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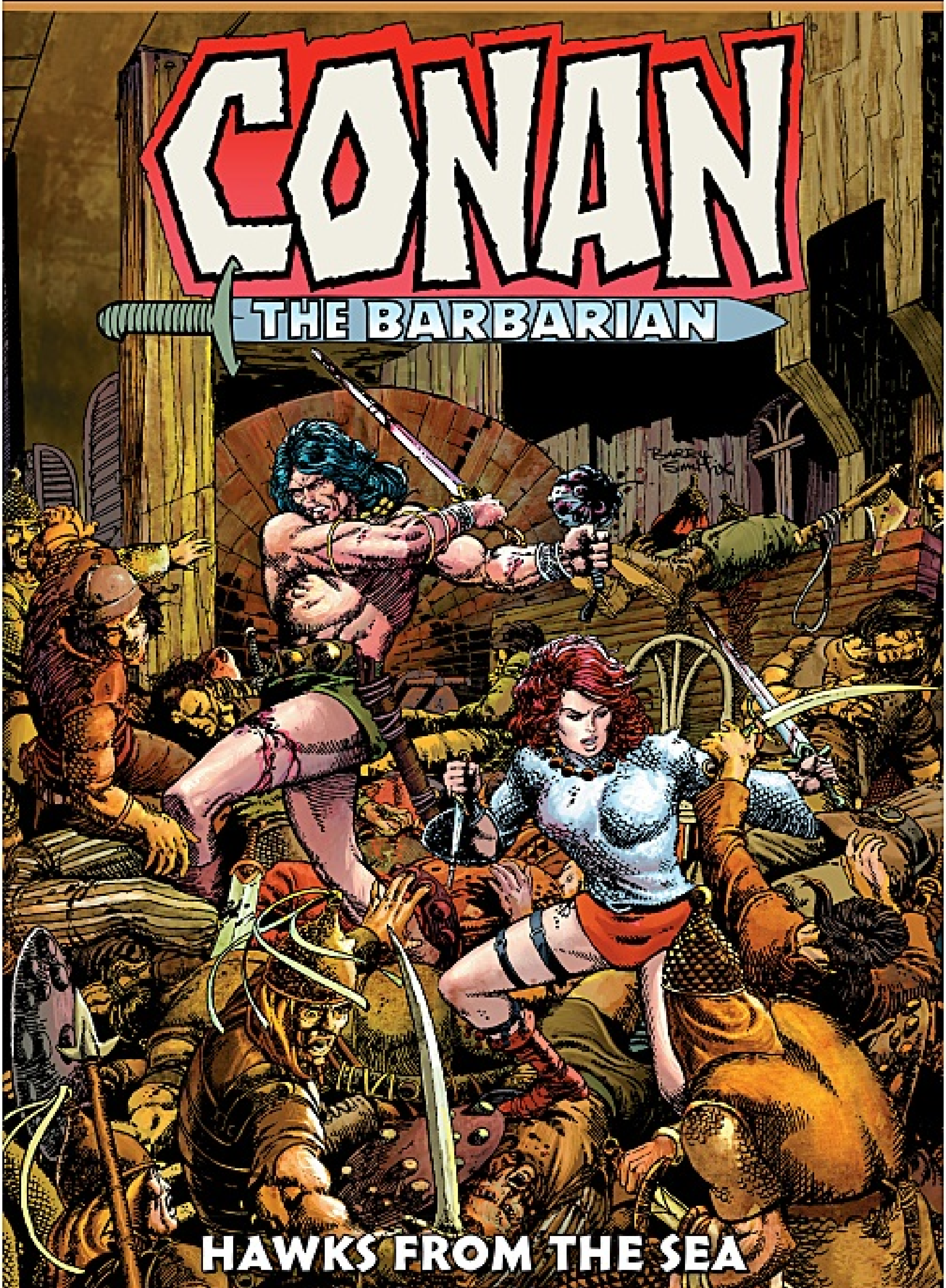

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

HAWKS FROM THE SEA

THOMAS • WINDSOR-SMITH

EPIC COLLECTION

CONAN
THE BARBARIAN

THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS

HAWKS FROM THE SEA

VOLUME 2

1972–1973

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #14-26

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

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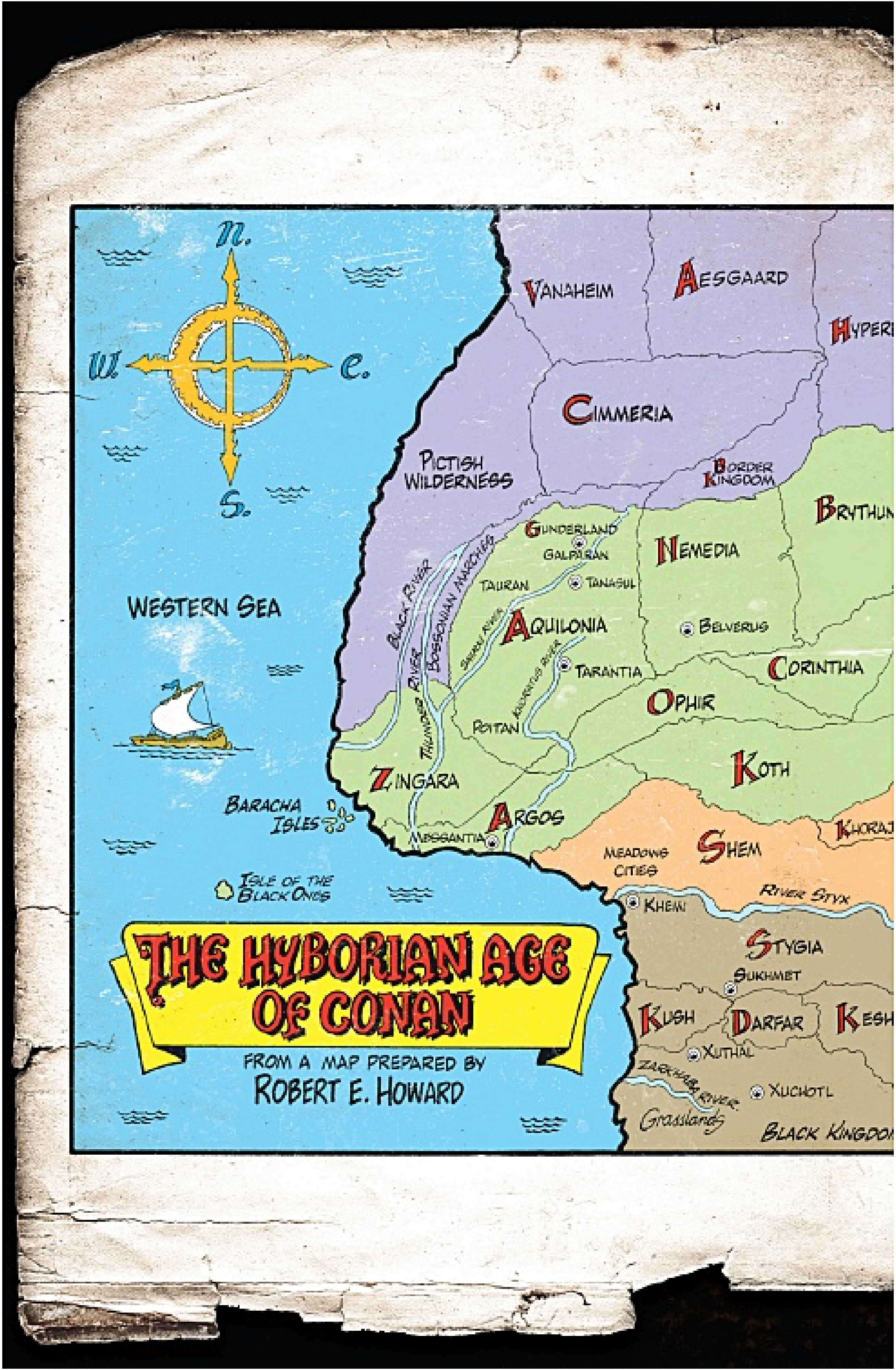
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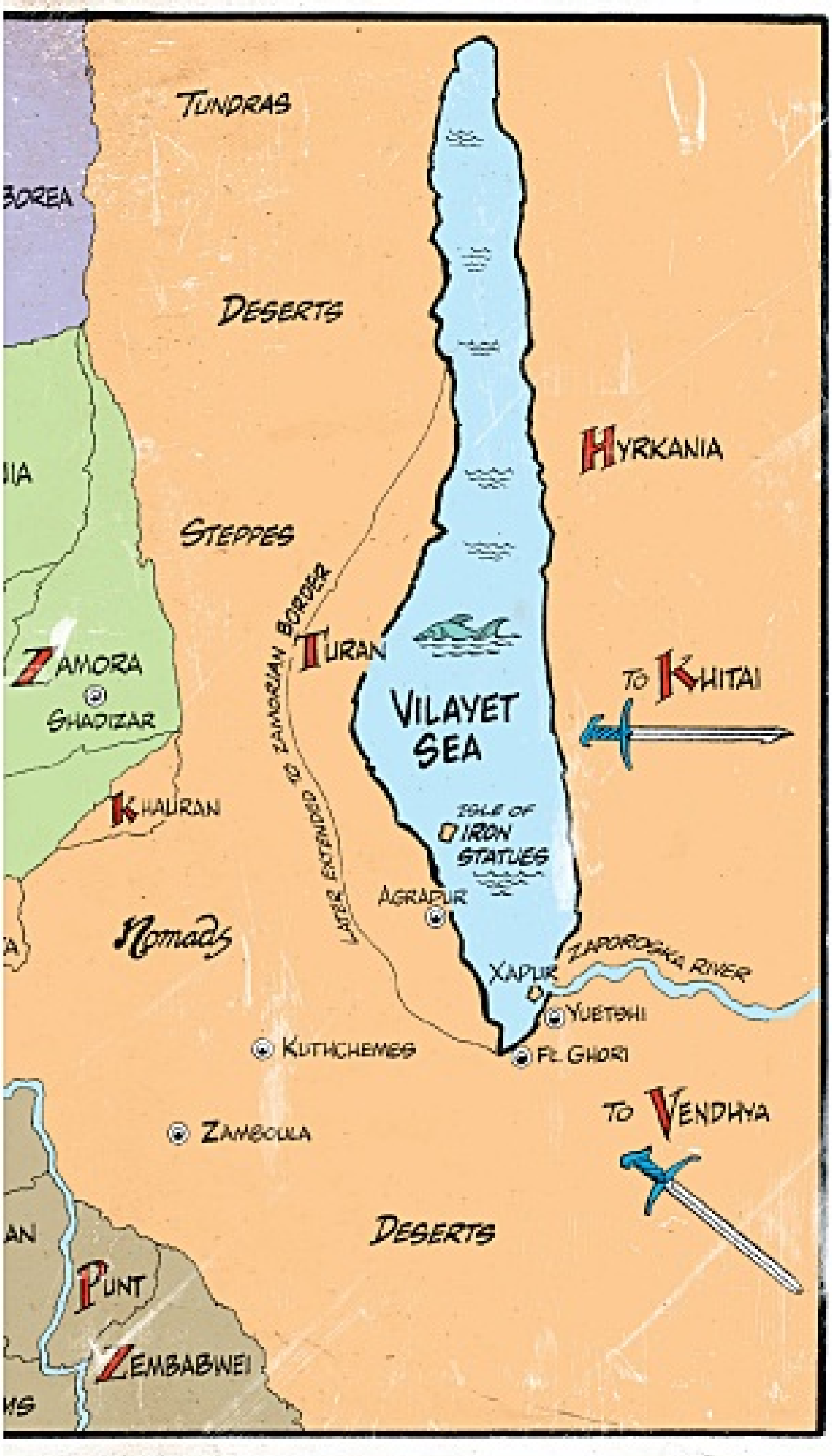
BORDER KINGDOM
BRYTHUN
GUNDERLAND
GALPARAN
NEMEDIA
TAURAN
TANASUL
BLACK RIVER
BOSSONIAN MARCHES
SHIRKI RIVER
AQUILONIA
BELVERUS
TARANTIA
KHOROTAS RIVER
THUNDER RIVER
CORINTHIA
OPHIR
POITAN
WESTERN SEA
KOTH
ZINGARA
BARACHA ISLES
ARGOS
MESSANTIA
KHORAJ
SHEM
MEADOW CITIES
ISLE OF THE BLACK ONES
KHEMI
RIVER STYX
STYGIA
SUKHMET
KUSH
DARFAR
KESH
XUTHAL
ZARKHEBA RIVER
XUCHOTL
Grasslands
BLACK KINGDO
THE HYBORIAN AGE OF CONAN
FROM A MAP PREPARED BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD


Tundras
Borea
Deserts
Hyrkania
Ia
Steppes
Later extended to Zamorian border
Turan
Zamora
Shadizar
To Khitai
Vilayet Sea
Khauran
Isle of Iron Statues
Agrapur
Nomads
A
Xapur
Zaporoska River
Yuetshi
Kuthchemes
Ft. Ghori
Zamboula
To Vendhya
Deserts
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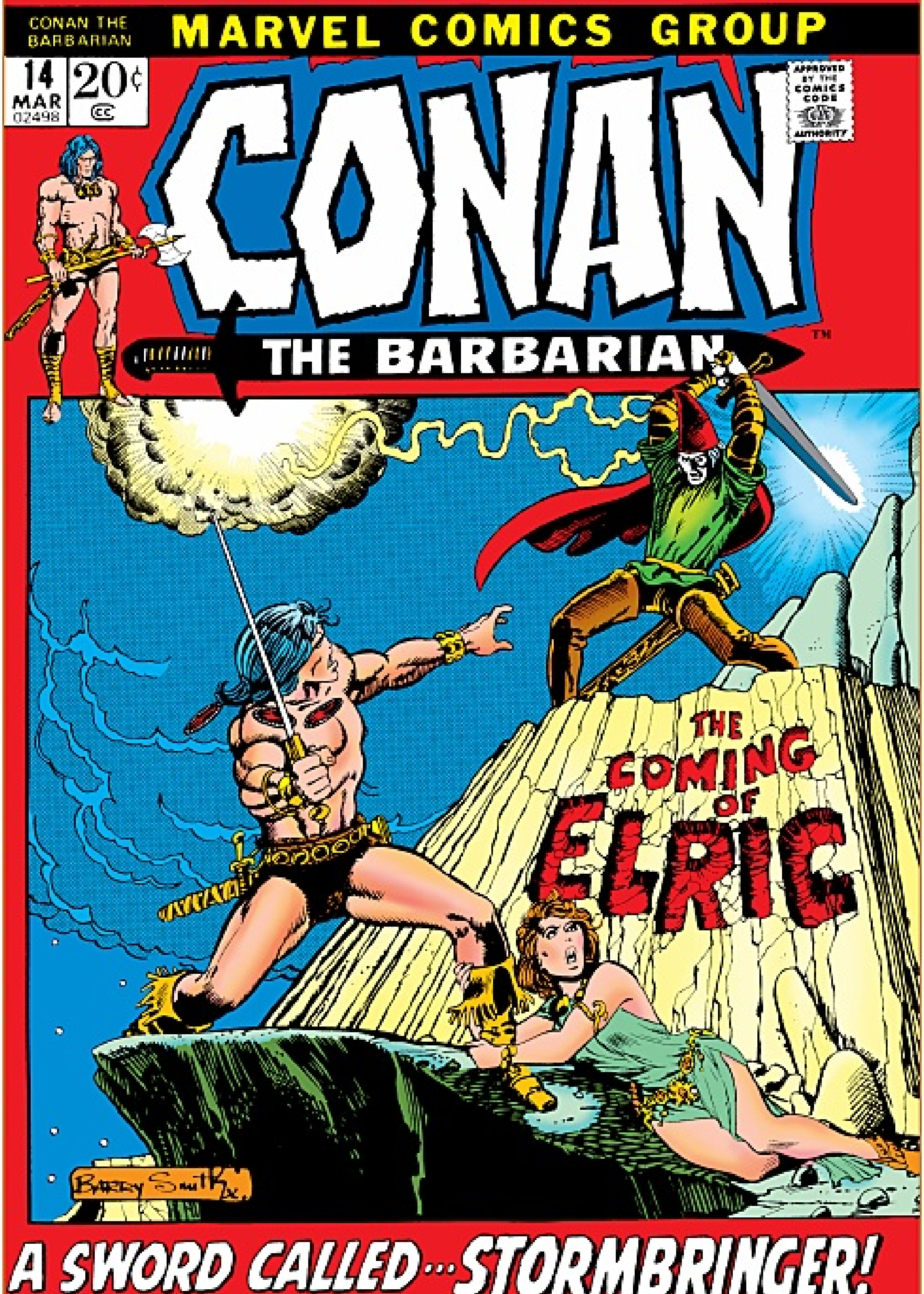
"Know, oh prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities, and the years of the rise of the Sons of Aryas, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars – Nemedia, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold.

"But the proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west. Hither came Conan the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandaled feet."

– The Nemedian Chronicles


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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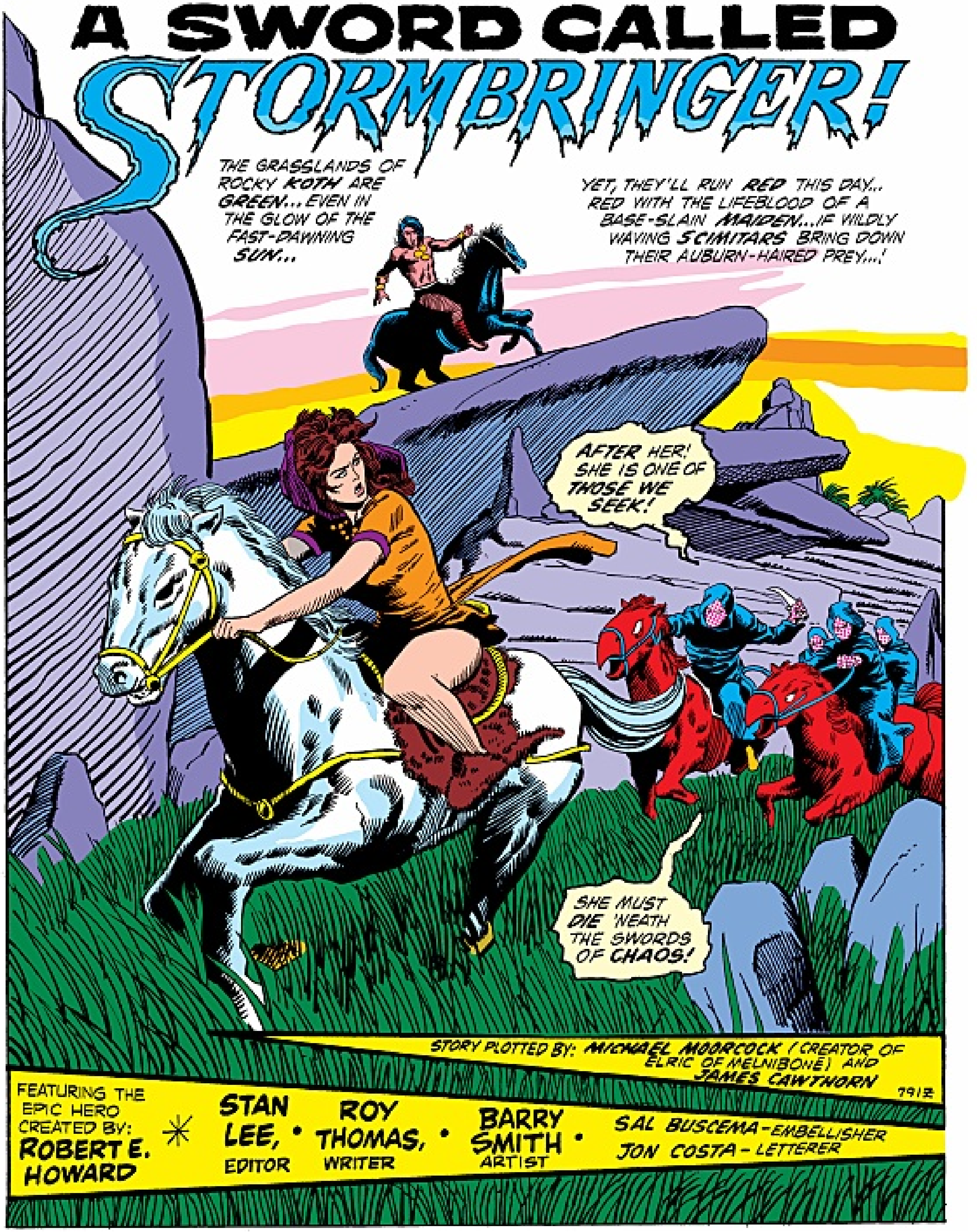
THE COMING OF ELRIC
BARRY SMITH
A SWORD CALLED...STORMBRINGER!

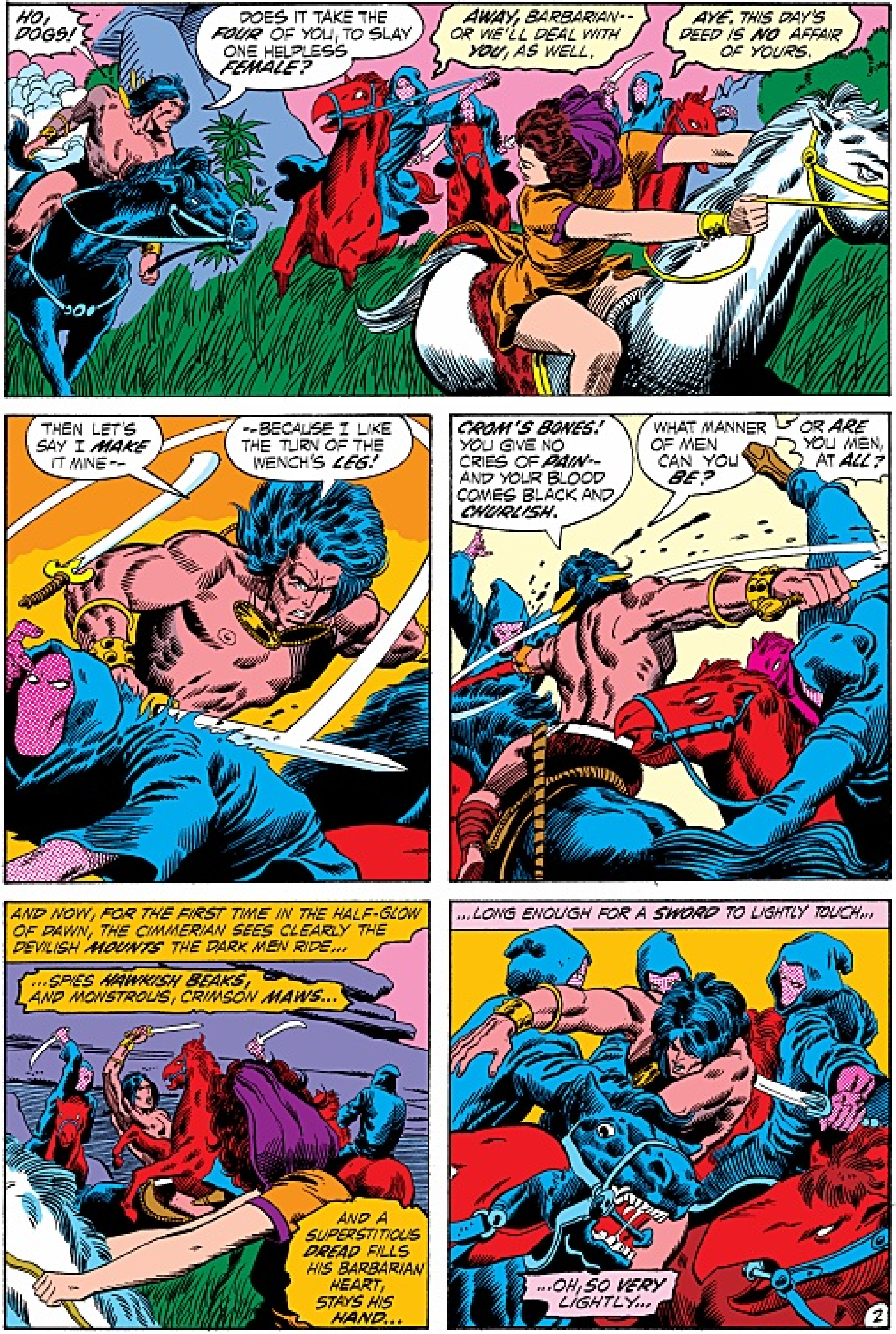
COVER ARTIST: BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

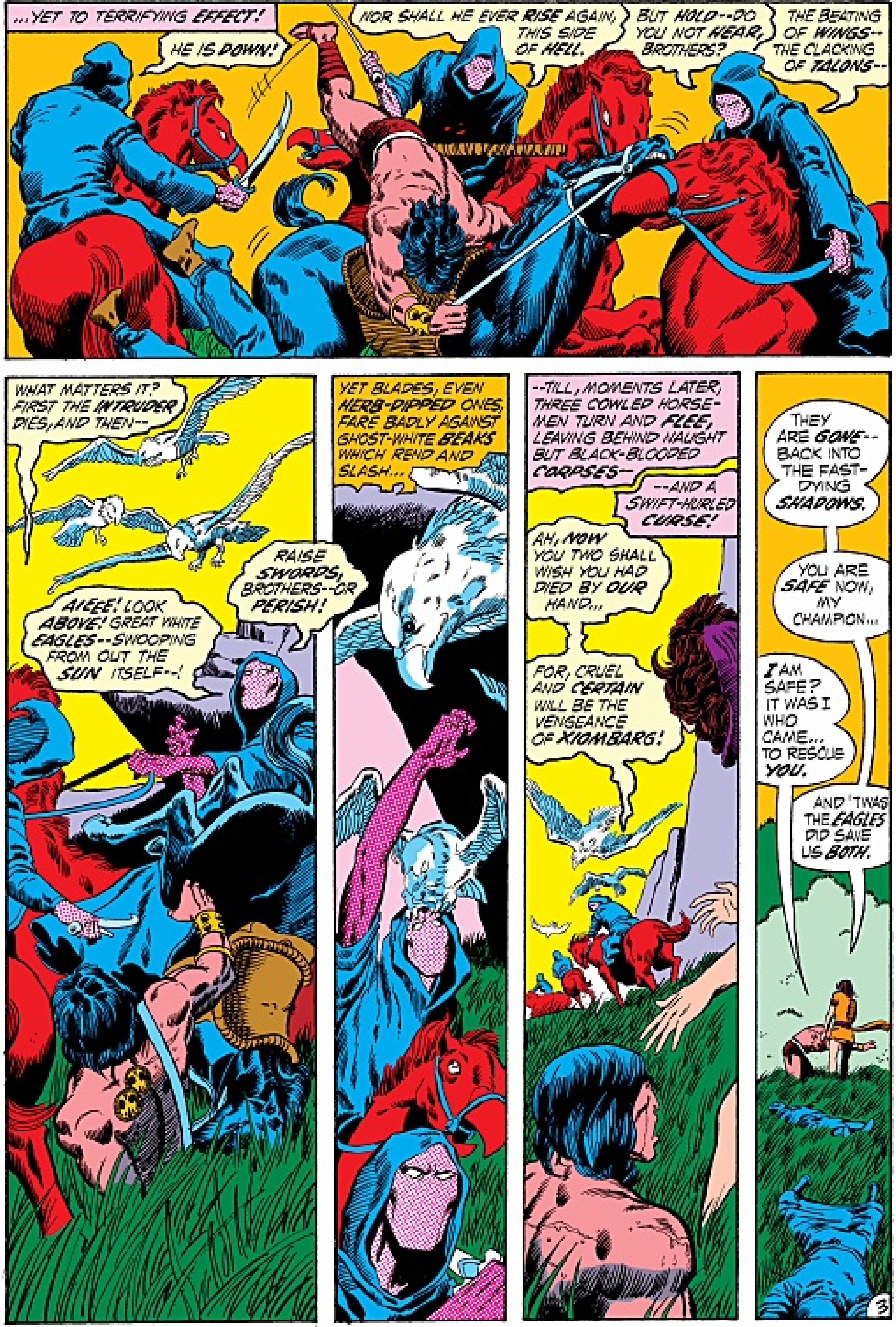
CONAN THE BARBARIAN!

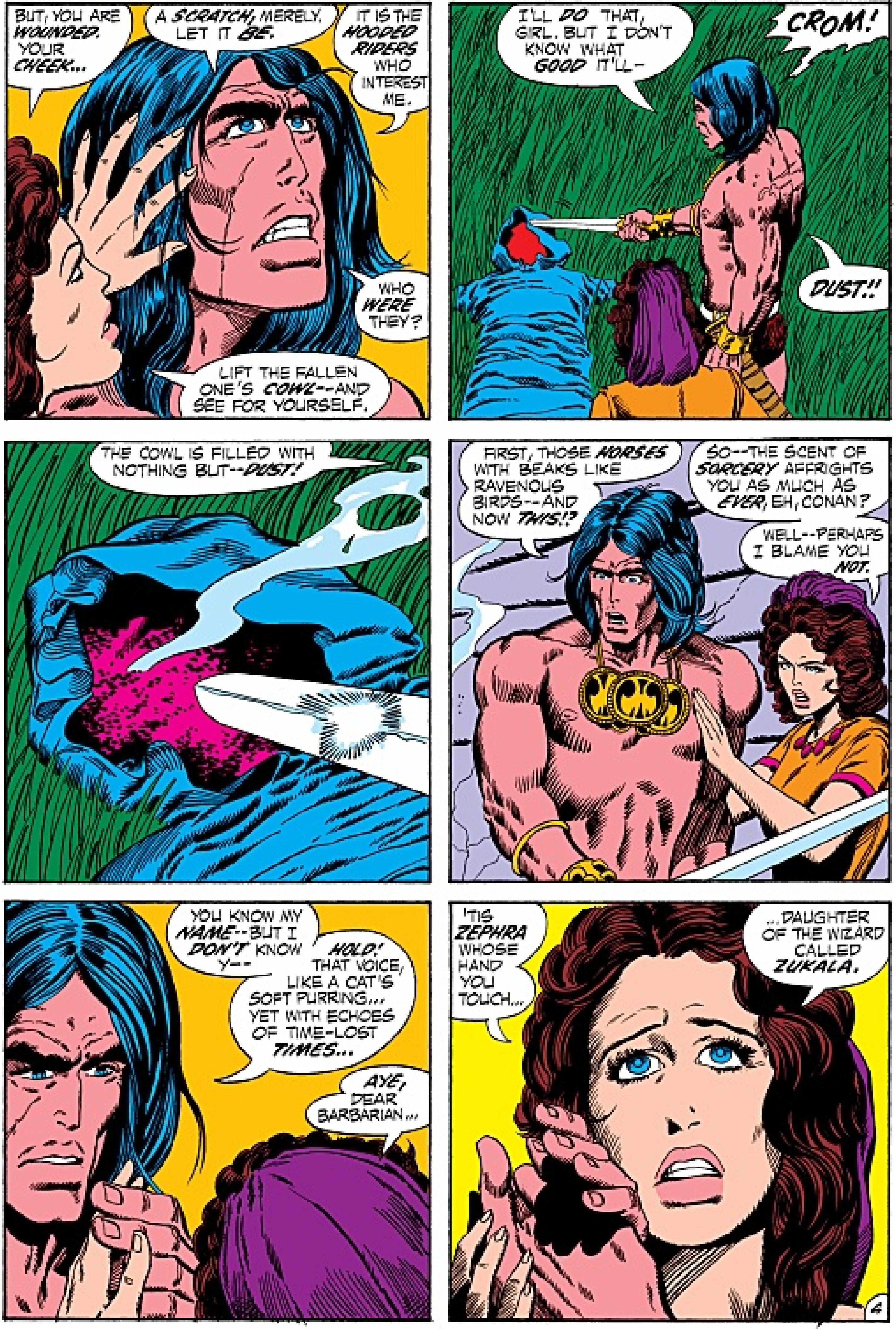
A SWORD CALLED STORMBRINGER!

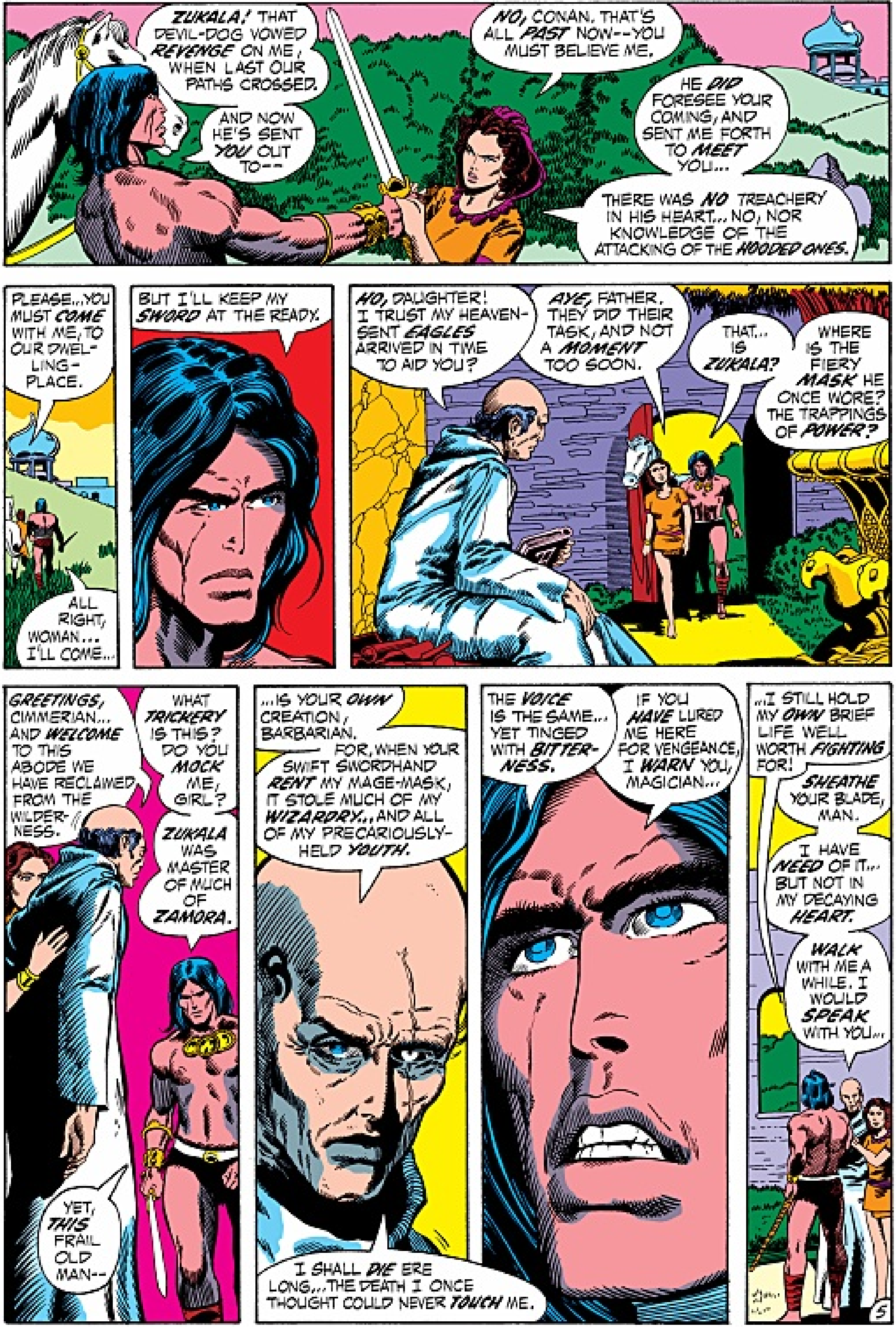

THE GRASSLANDS OF ROCKY **KOTH** ARE **GREEN**... EVEN IN THE GLOW OF THE FAST-DAWNING **SUN**...
YET, THEY'LL RUN **RED** THIS DAY... RED WITH THE LIFEBLOOD OF A BASE-SLAIN **MAIDEN**...IF WILDLY WAVING **SCIMITARS** BRING DOWN THEIR AUBURN-HAIRED PREY...!
AFTER HER! SHE IS ONE OF **THOSE WE SEEK!**
SHE MUST **DIE** 'NEATH THE SWORDS OF **CHAOS!**

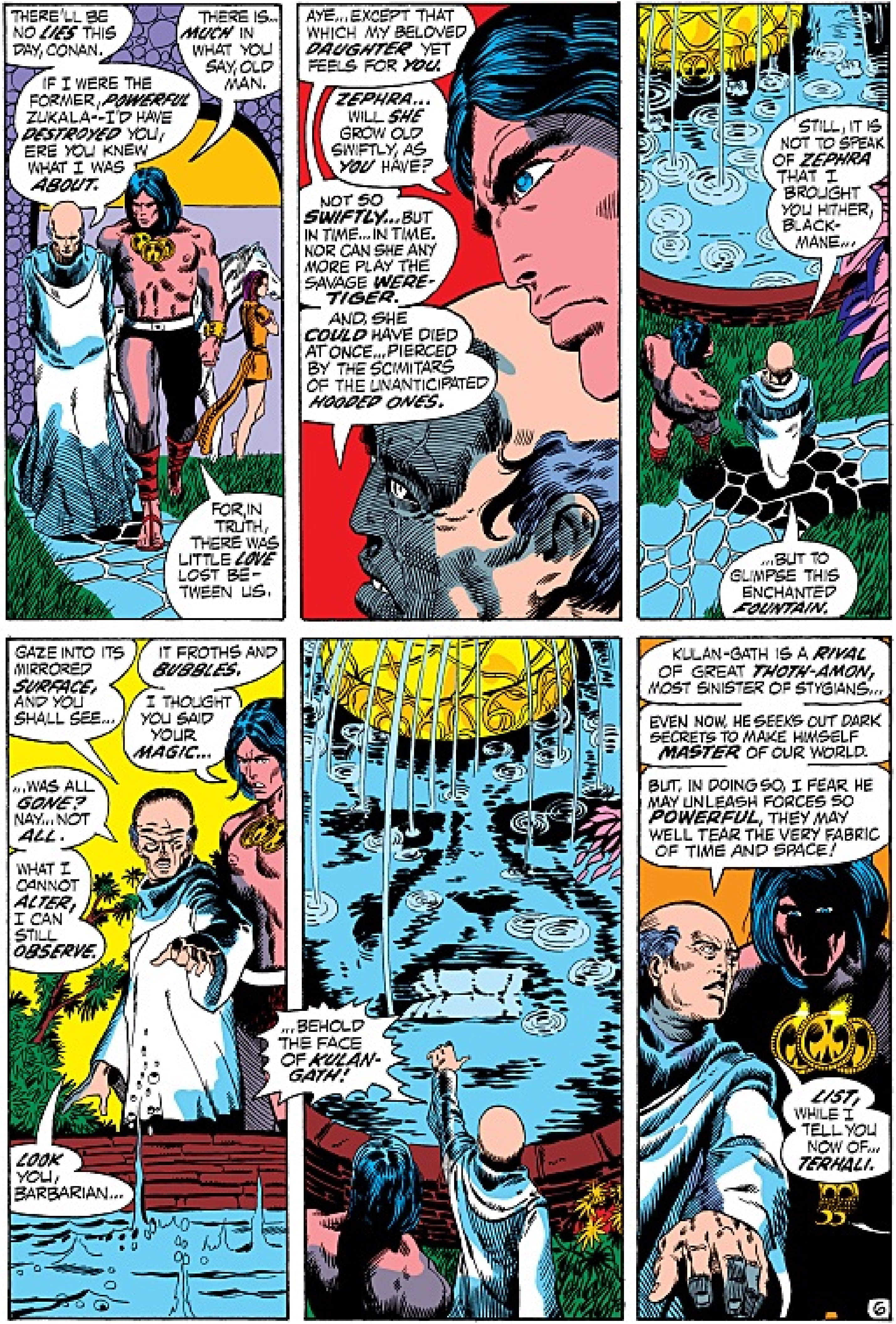
STORY PLOTTED BY: **MICHAEL MOORCOCK** (CREATOR OF ELRIC OF MELNIBONE) AND **JAMES CAWTHORN**
7912
FEATURING THE EPIC HERO CREATED BY: **ROBERT E. HOWARD** * **STAN LEE,** EDITOR • **ROY THOMAS,** WRITER • **BARRY SMITH** ARTIST • **SAL BUSCEMA**-EMBELLISHER **JON COSTA**-LETTERER

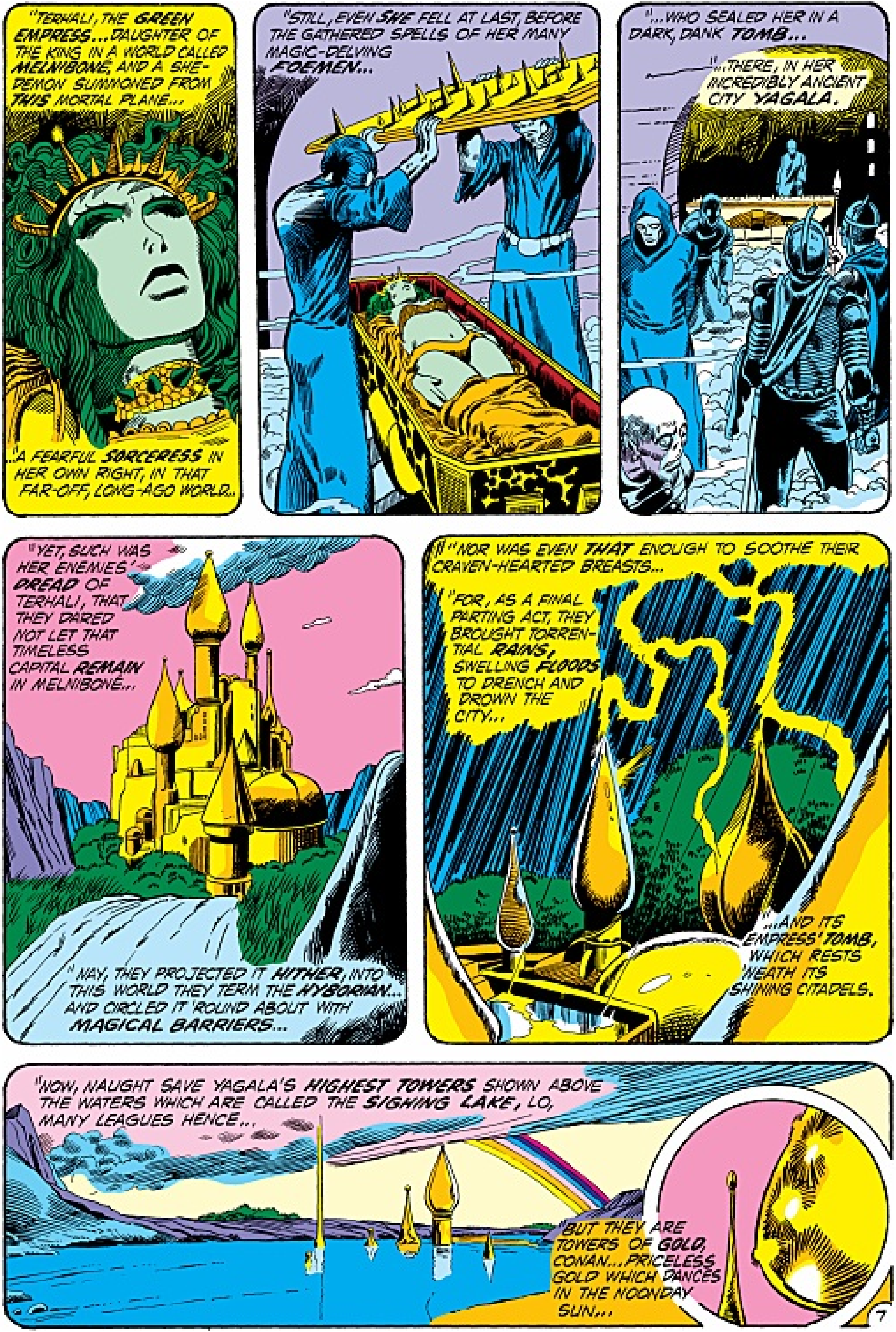

HO, DOGS!
DOES IT TAKE THE FOUR OF YOU, TO SLAY ONE HELPLESS FEMALE?
AWAY, BARBARIAN-- OR WE'LL DEAL WITH YOU, AS WELL.
AYE. THIS DAY'S DEED IS NO AFFAIR OF YOURS.
THEN LET'S SAY I MAKE IT MINE--
--BECAUSE I LIKE THE TURN OF THE WENCH'S LEG!
CROM'S BONES! YOU GIVE NO CRIES OF PAIN-- AND YOUR BLOOD COMES BLACK AND CHURLISH.
WHAT MANNER OF MEN CAN YOU BE?
OR ARE YOU MEN, AT ALL?
AND NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE HALF-GLOW OF DAWN, THE CIMMERIAN SEES CLEARLY THE DEVILISH MOUNTS THE DARK MEN RIDE...
...SPIES HAWKISH BEAKS, AND MONSTROUS, CRIMSON MAWS...
AND A SUPERSTITIOUS DREAD FILLS HIS BARBARIAN HEART, STAYS HIS HAND...
...LONG ENOUGH FOR A SWORD TO LIGHTLY TOUCH...
...OH, SO VERY LIGHTLY...

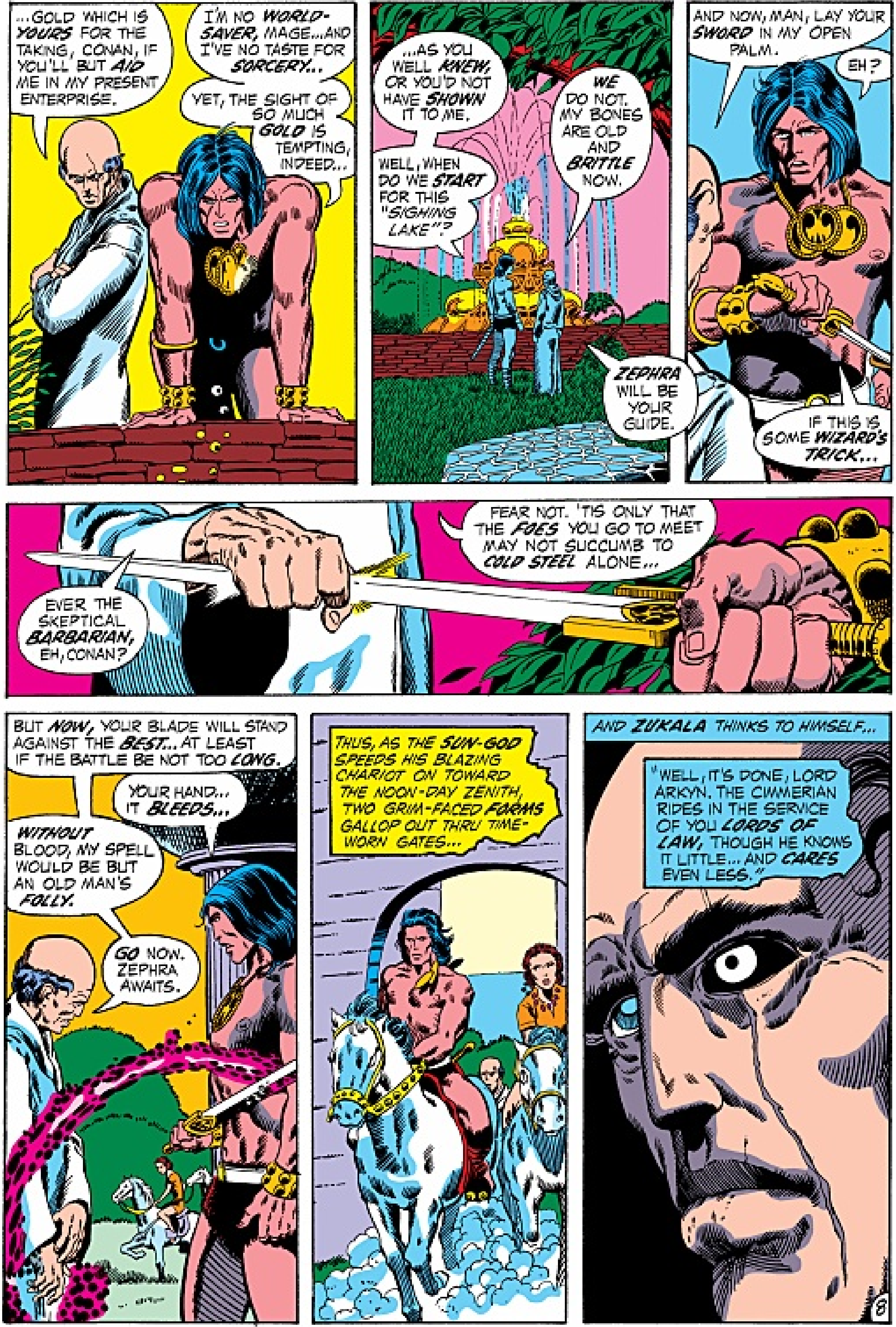

...YET TO TERRIFYING EFFECT!
HE IS DOWN!
NOR SHALL HE EVER RISE AGAIN, THIS SIDE OF HELL.
BUT HOLD--DO YOU NOT HEAR, BROTHERS?
THE BEATING OF WINGS-- THE CLACKING OF TALONS--
WHAT MATTERS IT? FIRST THE INTRUDER DIES, AND THEN--
AIEEE! LOOK ABOVE! GREAT WHITE EAGLES--SWOOPING FROM OUT THE SUN ITSELF--!
RAISE SWORDS, BROTHERS--OR PERISH!
YET BLADES, EVEN HERB-DIPPED ONES, FARE BADLY AGAINST GHOST-WHITE BEAKS WHICH REND AND SLASH...
--TILL, MOMENTS LATER, THREE COWLED HORSEMEN TURN AND FLEE, LEAVING BEHIND NAUGHT BUT BLACK-BLOODED CORPSES--
--AND A SWIFT-HURLED CURSE!
AH, NOW YOU TWO SHALL WISH YOU HAD DIED BY OUR HAND...
FOR, CRUEL AND CERTAIN WILL BE THE VENGEANCE OF XIOMBARG!
THEY ARE GONE-- BACK INTO THE FAST-DYING SHADOWS.
YOU ARE SAFE NOW, MY CHAMPION...
I AM SAFE? IT WAS I WHO CAME... TO RESCUE YOU.
AND 'TWAS THE EAGLES DID SAVE US BOTH.

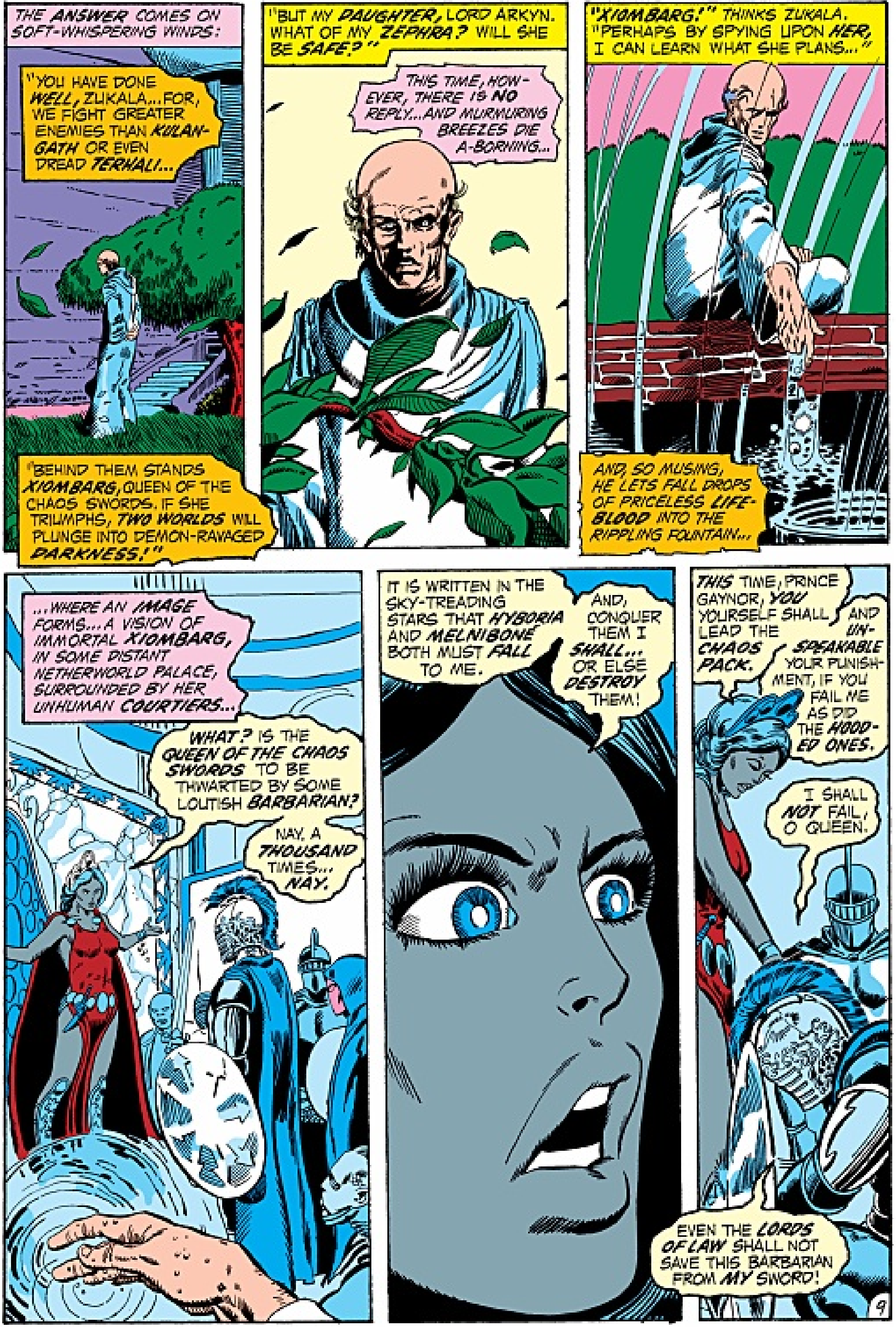

BUT, YOU ARE WOUNDED. YOUR CHEEK...
A SCRATCH, MERELY. LET IT BE.
IT IS THE HOODED RIDERS WHO INTEREST ME.
WHO WERE THEY?
LIFT THE FALLEN ONE'S COWL--AND SEE FOR YOURSELF.
I'LL DO THAT, GIRL. BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT GOOD IT'LL-
CROM!
DUST!!
THE COWL IS FILLED WITH NOTHING BUT--DUST!
FIRST, THOSE HORSES WITH BEAKS LIKE RAVENOUS BIRDS--AND NOW THIS!?
SO--THE SCENT OF SORCERY AFFRIGHTS YOU AS MUCH AS EVER, EH, CONAN?
WELL--PERHAPS I BLAME YOU NOT.
YOU KNOW MY NAME--BUT I DON'T KNOW Y--
HOLD! THAT VOICE, LIKE A CAT'S SOFT PURRING... YET WITH ECHOES OF TIME-LOST TIMES...
AYE, DEAR BARBARIAN...
'TIS ZEPHRA WHOSE HAND YOU TOUCH...
...DAUGHTER OF THE WIZARD CALLED ZUKALA.

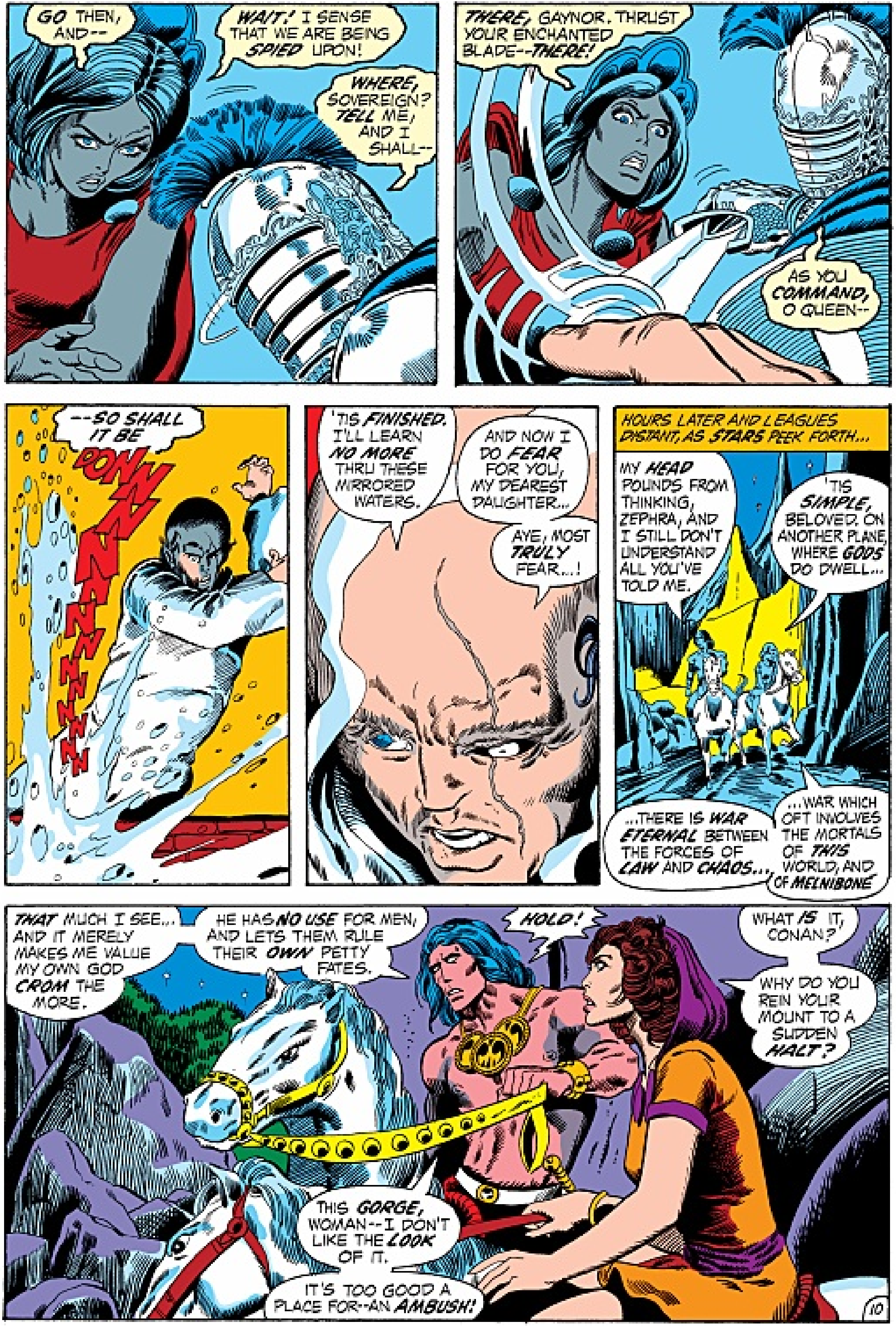

ZUKALA! THAT DEVIL-DOG VOWED REVENGE ON ME, WHEN LAST OUR PATHS CROSSED.
AND NOW HE'S SENT YOU OUT TO--
NO, CONAN. THAT'S ALL PAST NOW--YOU MUST BELIEVE ME.
HE DID FORESEE YOUR COMING, AND SENT ME FORTH TO MEET YOU...
THERE WAS NO TREACHERY IN HIS HEART... NO, NOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE ATTACKING OF THE HOODED ONES.
PLEASE... YOU MUST COME WITH ME, TO OUR DWELLING-PLACE.
ALL RIGHT, WOMAN... I'LL COME...
BUT I'LL KEEP MY SWORD AT THE READY.
NO, DAUGHTER! I TRUST MY HEAVEN-SENT EAGLES ARRIVED IN TIME TO AID YOU?
AYE, FATHER. THEY DID THEIR TASK, AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON.
THAT... IS ZUKALA?
WHERE IS THE FIERY MASK HE ONCE WORE? THE TRAPPINGS OF POWER?
GREETINGS, CIMMERIAN... AND WELCOME TO THIS ABODE WE HAVE RECLAIMED FROM THE WILDERNESS.
WHAT TRICKERY IS THIS? DO YOU MOCK ME, GIRL?
ZUKALA WAS MASTER OF MUCH OF ZAMORA.
YET, THIS FRAIL OLD MAN--
...IS YOUR OWN CREATION, BARBARIAN.
FOR, WHEN YOUR SWIFT SWORDHAND RENT MY MAGE-MASK, IT STOLE MUCH OF MY WIZARDRY... AND ALL OF MY PRECARIOUSLY-HELD YOUTH.
I SHALL DIE ERE LONG... THE DEATH I ONCE THOUGHT COULD NEVER TOUCH ME.
THE VOICE IS THE SAME... YET TINGED WITH BITTERNESS.
IF YOU HAVE LURED ME HERE FOR VENGEANCE, I WARN YOU, MAGICIAN...
...I STILL HOLD MY OWN BRIEF LIFE WELL WORTH FIGHTING FOR!
SHEATHE YOUR BLADE, MAN.
I HAVE NEED OF IT... BUT NOT IN MY DECAYING HEART.
WALK WITH ME A WHILE. I WOULD SPEAK WITH YOU...

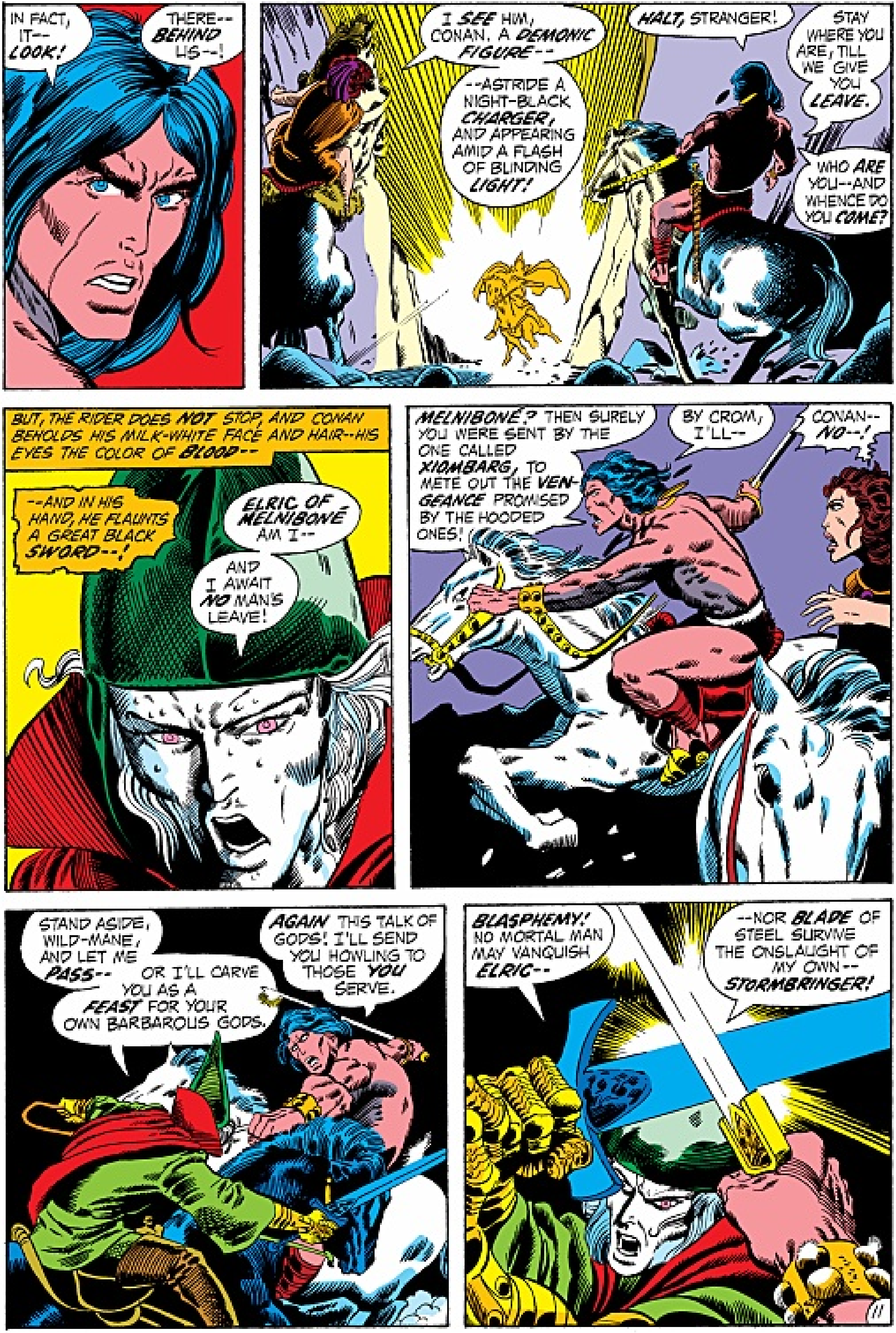

THERE'LL BE NO LIES THIS DAY, CONAN.
THERE IS... MUCH IN WHAT YOU SAY, OLD MAN.
IF I WERE THE FORMER, POWERFUL ZUKALA--I'D HAVE DESTROYED YOU, ERE YOU KNEW WHAT I WAS ABOUT.
FOR, IN TRUTH, THERE WAS LITTLE LOVE LOST BETWEEN US.
AYE... EXCEPT THAT WHICH MY BELOVED DAUGHTER YET FEELS FOR YOU.
ZEPHRA... WILL SHE GROW OLD SWIFTLY, AS YOU HAVE?
NOT SO SWIFTLY... BUT IN TIME... IN TIME. NOR CAN SHE ANY MORE PLAY THE SAVAGE WERE-TIGER.
AND, SHE COULD HAVE DIED AT ONCE... PIERCED BY THE SCIMITARS OF THE UNANTICIPATED HOODED ONES.
STILL, IT IS NOT TO SPEAK OF ZEPHRA THAT I BROUGHT YOU HITHER, BLACK-MANE...
...BUT TO GLIMPSE THIS ENCHANTED FOUNTAIN.
GAZE INTO ITS MIRRORED SURFACE, AND YOU SHALL SEE...
IT FROTHS AND BUBBLES.
I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOUR MAGIC...
...WAS ALL GONE? NAY... NOT ALL.
WHAT I CANNOT ALTER, I CAN STILL OBSERVE.
LOOK YOU, BARBARIAN...
...BEHOLD THE FACE OF KULAN-GATH!
KULAN-GATH IS A RIVAL OF GREAT THOTH-AMON, MOST SINISTER OF STYGIANS...
EVEN NOW, HE SEEKS OUT DARK SECRETS TO MAKE HIMSELF MASTER OF OUR WORLD.
BUT, IN DOING SO, I FEAR HE MAY UNLEASH FORCES SO POWERFUL, THEY MAY WELL TEAR THE VERY FABRIC OF TIME AND SPACE!
LIST, WHILE I TELL YOU NOW OF... TERHALI.

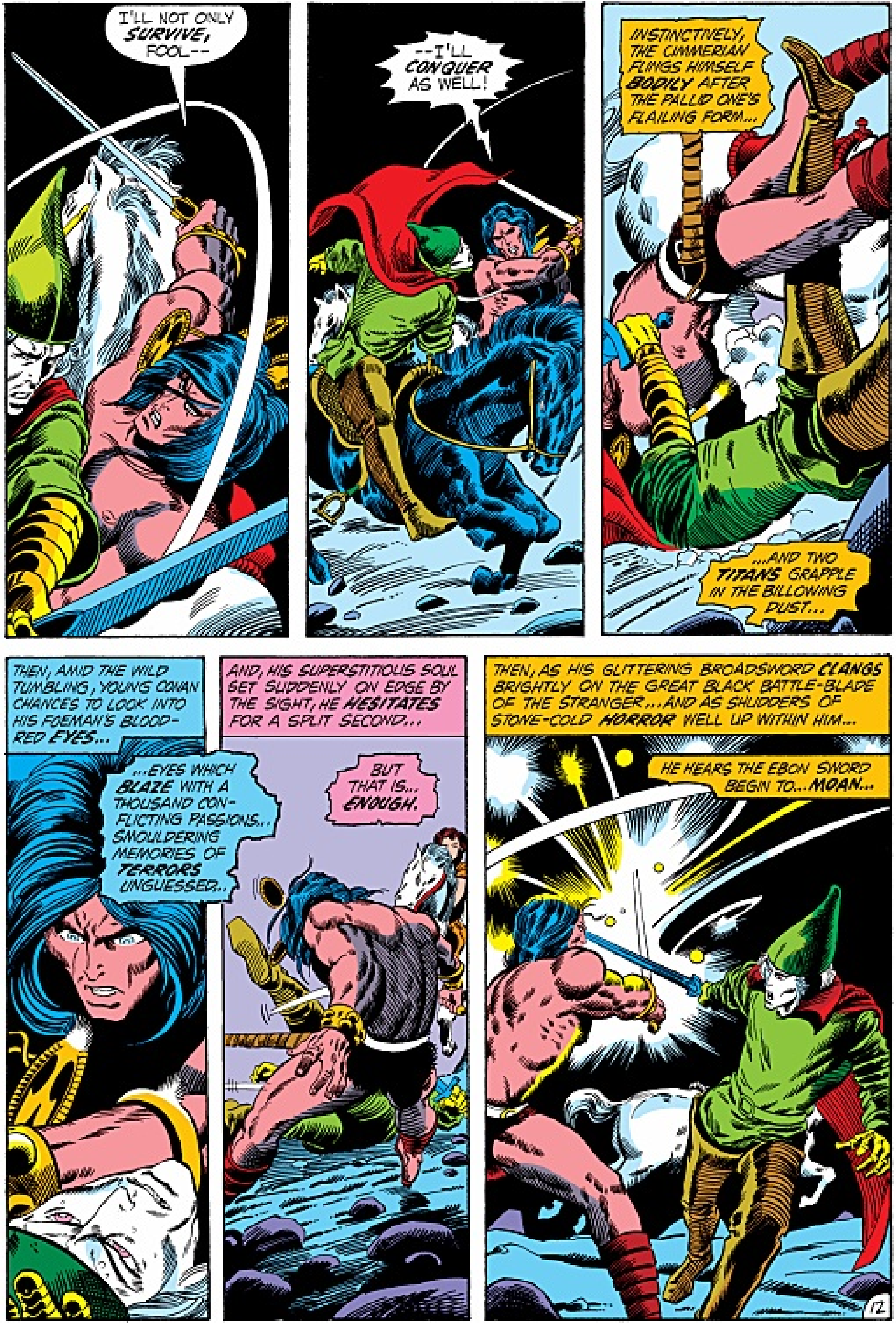

"TERHALI, THE GREEN EMPRESS...DAUGHTER OF THE KING IN A WORLD CALLED MELNIBONÉ, AND A SHE-DEMON SUMMONED FROM THIS MORTAL PLANE...
...A FEARFUL SORCERESS IN HER OWN RIGHT, IN THAT FAR-OFF, LONG-AGO WORLD...
"STILL, EVEN SHE FELL AT LAST, BEFORE THE GATHERED SPELLS OF HER MANY MAGIC-DELVING FOEMEN...
"...WHO SEALED HER IN A DARK, DANK TOMB...
"...THERE, IN HER INCREDIBLY ANCIENT CITY YAGALA.
"YET, SUCH WAS HER ENEMIES' DREAD OF TERHALI, THAT THEY DARED NOT LET THAT TIMELESS CAPITAL REMAIN IN MELNIBONÉ...
"NAY, THEY PROJECTED IT HITHER, INTO THIS WORLD THEY TERM THE HYBORIAN... AND CIRCLED IT 'ROUND ABOUT WITH MAGICAL BARRIERS...
"NOR WAS EVEN THAT ENOUGH TO SOOTHE THEIR CRAVEN-HEARTED BREASTS...
"FOR, AS A FINAL PARTING ACT, THEY BROUGHT TORRENTIAL RAINS, SWELLING FLOODS TO DRENCH AND DROWN THE CITY...
...AND ITS EMPRESS' TOMB, WHICH RESTS 'NEATH ITS SHINING CITADELS.
"NOW, NAUGHT SAVE YAGALA'S HIGHEST TOWERS SHOWN ABOVE THE WATERS WHICH ARE CALLED THE SIGHING LAKE, LO, MANY LEAGUES HENCE...
BUT THEY ARE TOWERS OF GOLD, CONAN...PRICELESS GOLD WHICH DANCES IN THE NOONDAY SUN...

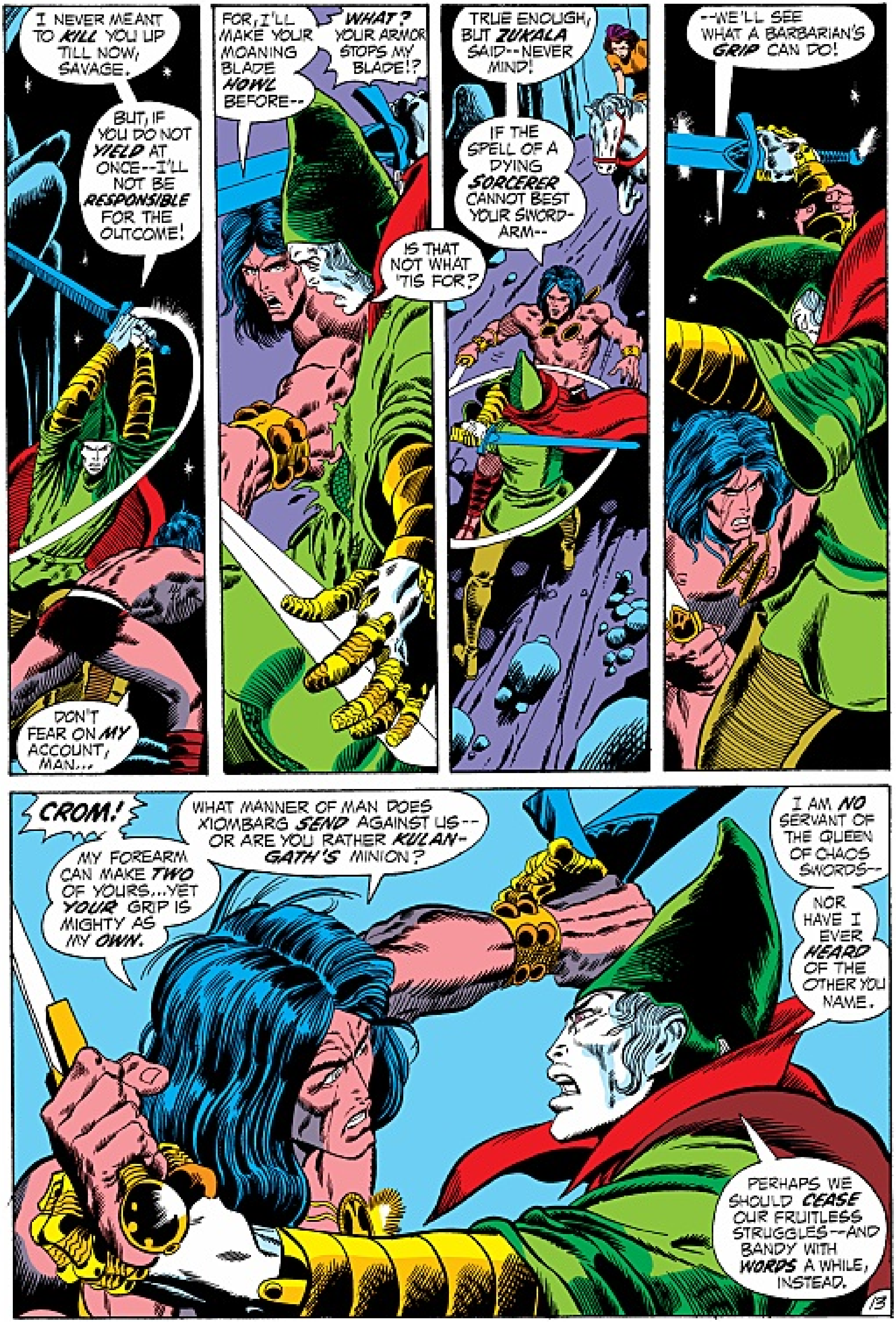

...GOLD WHICH IS *YOURS* FOR THE TAKING, CONAN, IF YOU'LL BUT *AID* ME IN MY PRESENT ENTERPRISE.
I'M NO *WORLD-SAVER,* MAGE...AND I'VE NO TASTE FOR *SORCERY...*
YET, THE SIGHT OF SO MUCH *GOLD* IS TEMPTING, INDEED...
...AS YOU WELL *KNEW,* OR YOU'D NOT HAVE *SHOWN* IT TO ME.
WELL, WHEN DO WE *START* FOR THIS "*SIGHING LAKE*"?
WE DO NOT. MY BONES ARE OLD AND *BRITTLE* NOW.
ZEPHRA WILL BE YOUR GUIDE.
AND NOW, MAN, LAY YOUR *SWORD* IN MY OPEN PALM.
EH?
IF THIS IS SOME *WIZARD'S TRICK...*
FEAR NOT. 'TIS ONLY THAT THE *FOES* YOU GO TO MEET MAY NOT SUCCUMB TO *COLD STEEL* ALONE...
EVER THE SKEPTICAL *BARBARIAN,* EH, CONAN?
BUT *NOW,* YOUR BLADE WILL STAND AGAINST THE *BEST*... AT LEAST IF THE BATTLE BE NOT TOO *LONG.*
YOUR HAND... IT *BLEEDS...*
WITHOUT BLOOD, MY SPELL WOULD BE BUT AN OLD MAN'S *FOLLY.*
GO NOW. ZEPHRA AWAITS.
THUS, AS THE *SUN-GOD* SPEEDS HIS BLAZING CHARIOT ON TOWARD THE NOON-DAY ZENITH, TWO GRIM-FACED *FORMS* GALLOP OUT THRU TIME-WORN GATES...
AND *ZUKALA* THINKS TO HIMSELF...
"WELL, IT'S DONE, LORD ARKYN. THE CIMMERIAN RIDES IN THE SERVICE OF YOU *LORDS OF LAW,* THOUGH HE KNOWS IT LITTLE... AND *CARES* EVEN LESS."

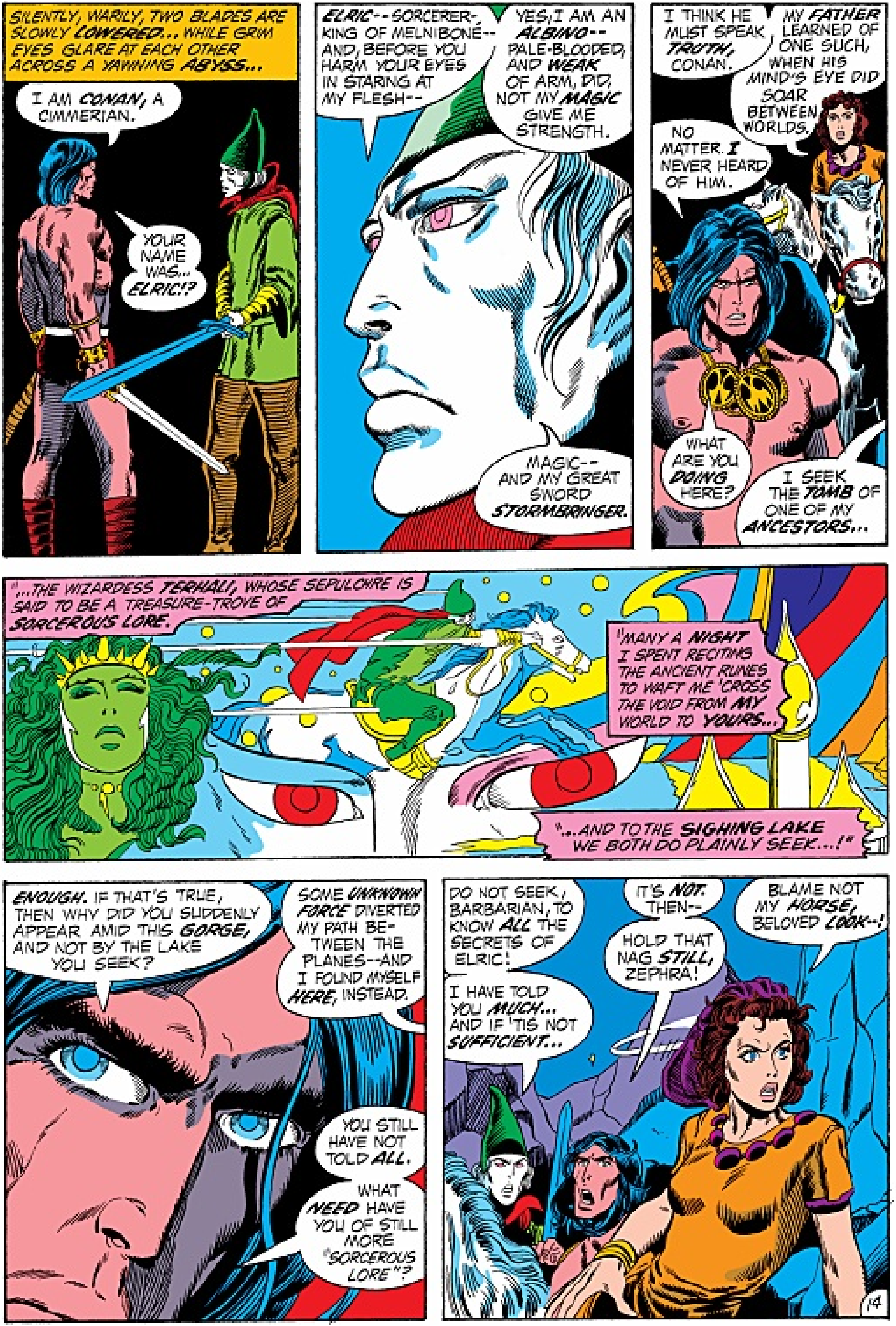

THE ANSWER COMES ON SOFT-WHISPERING WINDS:
"YOU HAVE DONE WELL, ZUKALA...FOR, WE FIGHT GREATER ENEMIES THAN KULAN-GATH OR EVEN DREAD TERHALI...
"BEHIND THEM STANDS XIOMBARG, QUEEN OF THE CHAOS SWORDS. IF SHE TRIUMPHS, TWO WORLDS WILL PLUNGE INTO DEMON-RAVAGED DARKNESS!"
"BUT MY DAUGHTER, LORD ARKYN. WHAT OF MY ZEPHRA? WILL SHE BE SAFE?"
THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO REPLY...AND MURMURING BREEZES DIE A-BORNING...
"XIOMBARG!" THINKS ZUKALA. "PERHAPS BY SPYING UPON HER, I CAN LEARN WHAT SHE PLANS..."
AND, SO MUSING, HE LETS FALL DROPS OF PRICELESS LIFE-BLOOD INTO THE RIPPLING FOUNTAIN...
...WHERE AN IMAGE FORMS...A VISION OF IMMORTAL XIOMBARG, IN SOME DISTANT NETHERWORLD PALACE, SURROUNDED BY HER UNHUMAN COURTIERS...
WHAT? IS THE QUEEN OF THE CHAOS SWORDS TO BE THWARTED BY SOME LOUTISH BARBARIAN?
NAY, A THOUSAND TIMES... NAY.
IT IS WRITTEN IN THE SKY-TREADING STARS THAT HYBORIA AND MELNIBONÉ BOTH MUST FALL TO ME.
AND, CONQUER THEM I SHALL... OR ELSE DESTROY THEM!
THIS TIME, PRINCE GAYNOR, YOU YOURSELF SHALL LEAD THE CHAOS PACK.
AND UNSPEAKABLE YOUR PUNISHMENT, IF YOU FAIL ME AS DID THE HOODED ONES.
I SHALL NOT FAIL, O QUEEN.
EVEN THE LORDS OF LAW SHALL NOT SAVE THIS BARBARIAN FROM MY SWORD!

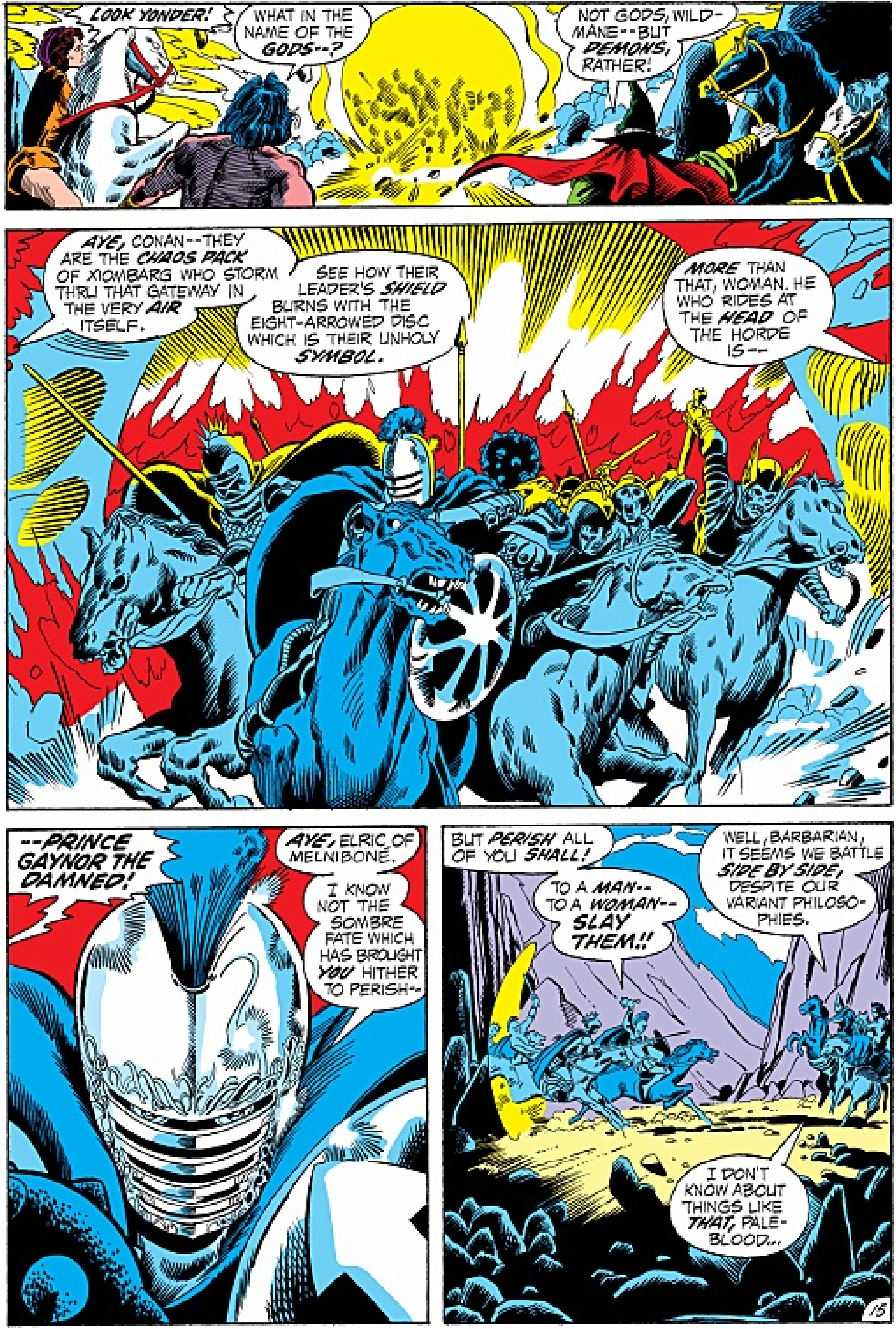

GO THEN, AND--
WAIT! I SENSE THAT WE ARE BEING SPIED UPON!
WHERE, SOVEREIGN? TELL ME, AND I SHALL--
THERE, GAYNOR. THRUST YOUR ENCHANTED BLADE--THERE!
AS YOU COMMAND, O QUEEN--
--SO SHALL IT BE
DONNNNNNNNNNNN
'TIS FINISHED. I'LL LEARN NO MORE THRU THESE MIRRORED WATERS.
AND NOW I DO FEAR FOR YOU, MY DEAREST DAUGHTER...
AYE, MOST TRULY FEAR...!
HOURS LATER AND LEAGUES DISTANT, AS STARS PEEK FORTH...
MY HEAD POUNDS FROM THINKING, ZEPHRA, AND I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND ALL YOU'VE TOLD ME.
'TIS SIMPLE, BELOVED. ON ANOTHER PLANE, WHERE GODS DO DWELL...
...THERE IS WAR ETERNAL BETWEEN THE FORCES OF LAW AND CHAOS...
...WAR WHICH OFT INVOLVES THE MORTALS OF THIS WORLD, AND OF MELNIBONÉ
THAT MUCH I SEE... AND IT MERELY MAKES ME VALUE MY OWN GOD CROM THE MORE.
HE HAS NO USE FOR MEN, AND LETS THEM RULE THEIR OWN PETTY FATES.
HOLD!
WHAT IS IT, CONAN?
WHY DO YOU REIN YOUR MOUNT TO A SUDDEN HALT?
THIS GORGE, WOMAN--I DON'T LIKE THE LOOK OF IT.
IT'S TOO GOOD A PLACE FOR--AN AMBUSH!

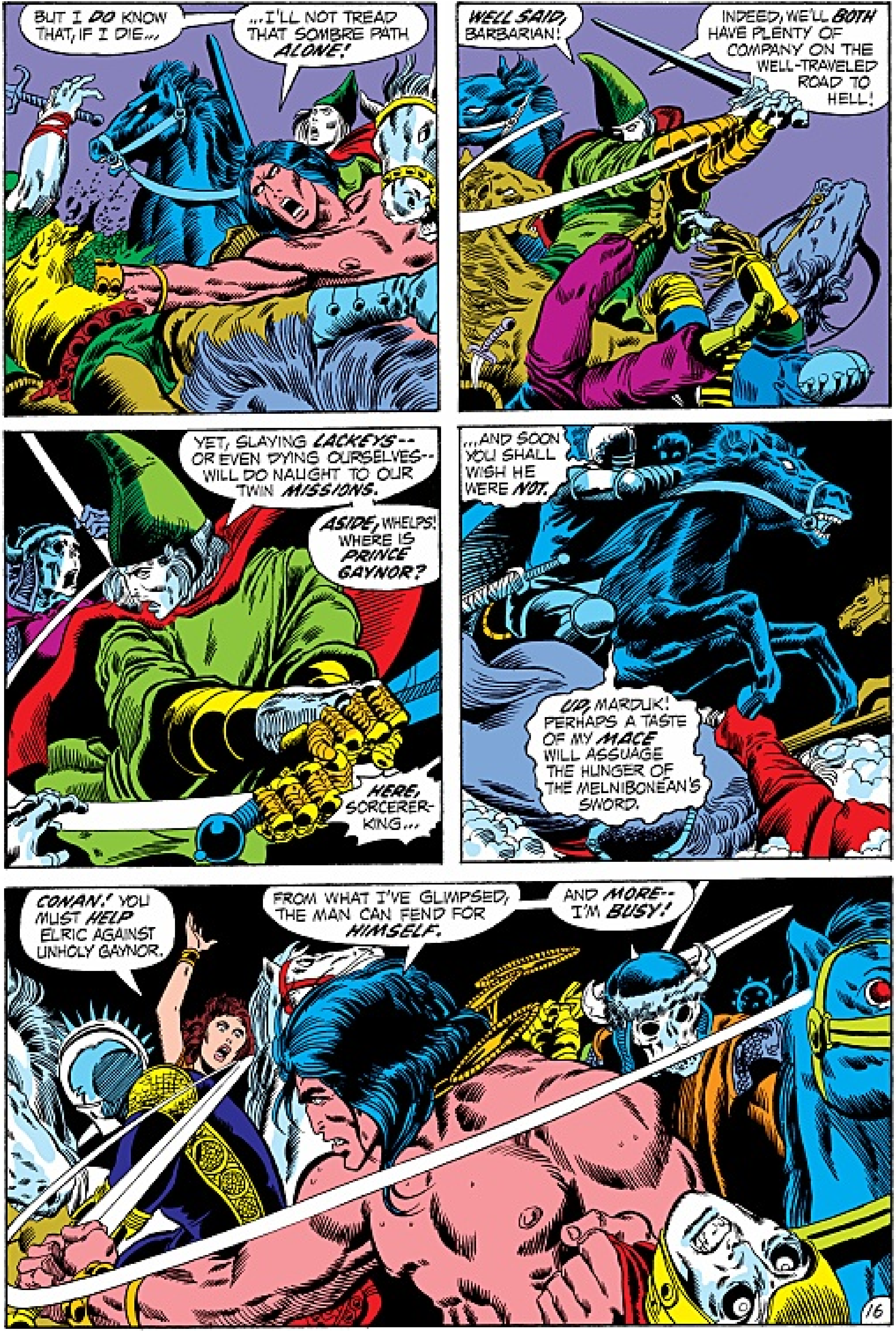

IN FACT, IT-- LOOK!
THERE-- BEHIND US--!
I SEE HIM, CONAN. A DEMONIC FIGURE--
--ASTRIDE A NIGHT-BLACK CHARGER, AND APPEARING AMID A FLASH OF BLINDING LIGHT!
HALT, STRANGER!
STAY WHERE YOU ARE, TILL WE GIVE YOU LEAVE.
WHO ARE YOU--AND WHENCE DO YOU COME?
BUT, THE RIDER DOES NOT STOP, AND CONAN BEHOLDS HIS MILK-WHITE FACE AND HAIR--HIS EYES THE COLOR OF BLOOD--
--AND IN HIS HAND, HE FLAUNTS A GREAT BLACK SWORD--!
ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ AM I--
AND I AWAIT NO MAN'S LEAVE!
MELNIBONÉ? THEN SURELY YOU WERE SENT BY THE ONE CALLED XIOMBARG, TO METE OUT THE VENGEANCE PROMISED BY THE HOODED ONES!
BY CROM, I'LL--
CONAN-- NO--!
STAND ASIDE, WILD-MANE, AND LET ME PASS-- OR I'LL CARVE YOU AS A FEAST FOR YOUR OWN BARBAROUS GODS.
AGAIN THIS TALK OF GODS! I'LL SEND YOU HOWLING TO THOSE YOU SERVE.
BLASPHEMY! NO MORTAL MAN MAY VANQUISH ELRIC--
--NOR BLADE OF STEEL SURVIVE THE ONSLAUGHT OF MY OWN-- STORMBRINGER!

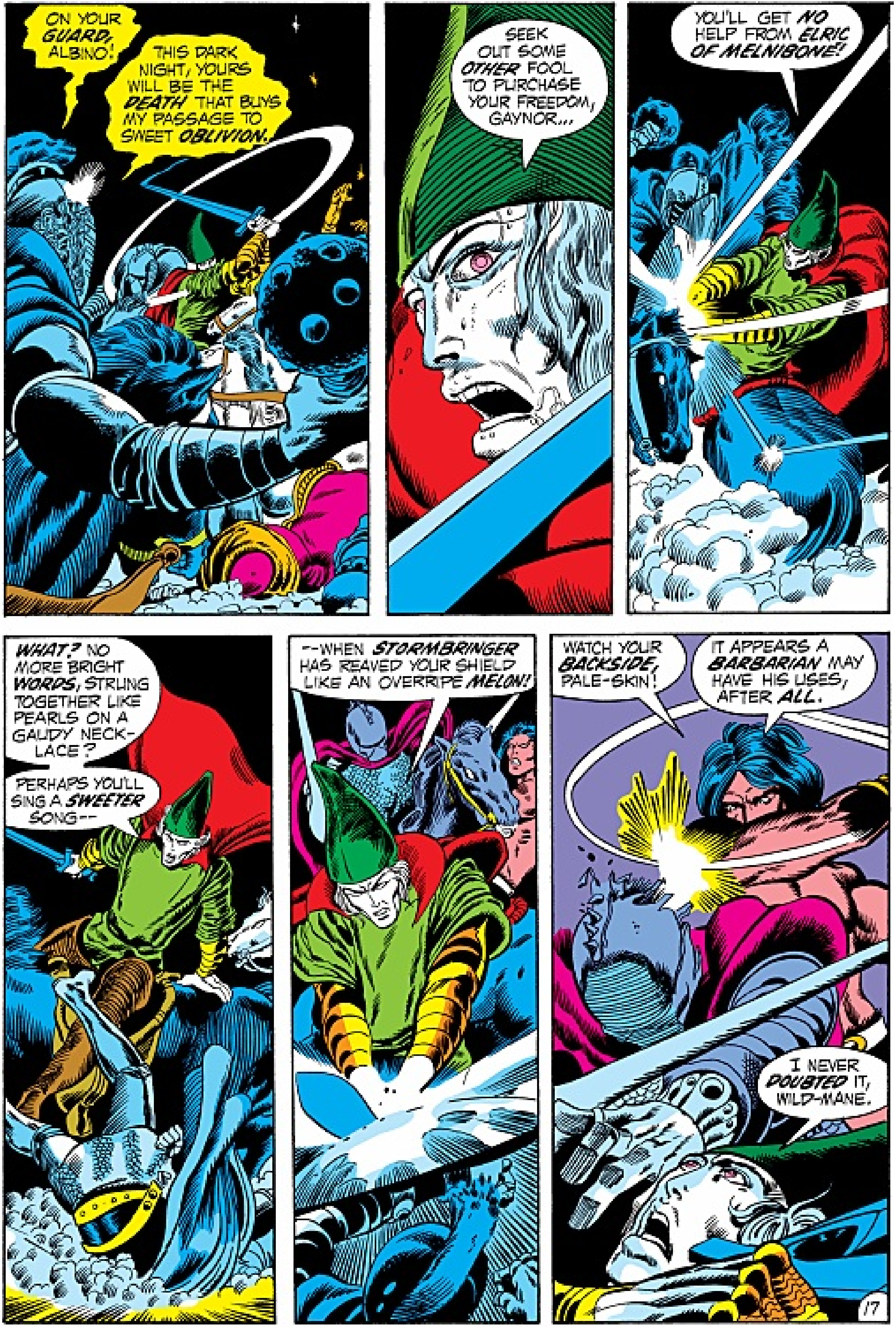

I'LL NOT ONLY SURVIVE, FOOL--
--I'LL CONQUER AS WELL!
INSTINCTIVELY, THE CIMMERIAN FLINGS HIMSELF BODILY AFTER THE PALLID ONE'S FLAILING FORM...
...AND TWO TITANS GRAPPLE IN THE BILLOWING DUST...
THEN, AMID THE WILD TUMBLING, YOUNG CONAN CHANCES TO LOOK INTO HIS FOEMAN'S BLOOD-RED EYES...
...EYES WHICH BLAZE WITH A THOUSAND CONFLICTING PASSIONS... SMOULDERING MEMORIES OF TERRORS UNGUESSED...
AND, HIS SUPERSTITIOUS SOUL SET SUDDENLY ON EDGE BY THE SIGHT, HE HESITATES FOR A SPLIT SECOND...
BUT THAT IS... ENOUGH.
THEN, AS HIS GLITTERING BROADSWORD CLANGS BRIGHTLY ON THE GREAT BLACK BATTLE-BLADE OF THE STRANGER... AND AS SHUDDERS OF STONE-COLD HORROR WELL UP WITHIN HIM...
HE HEARS THE EBON SWORD BEGIN TO... MOAN...

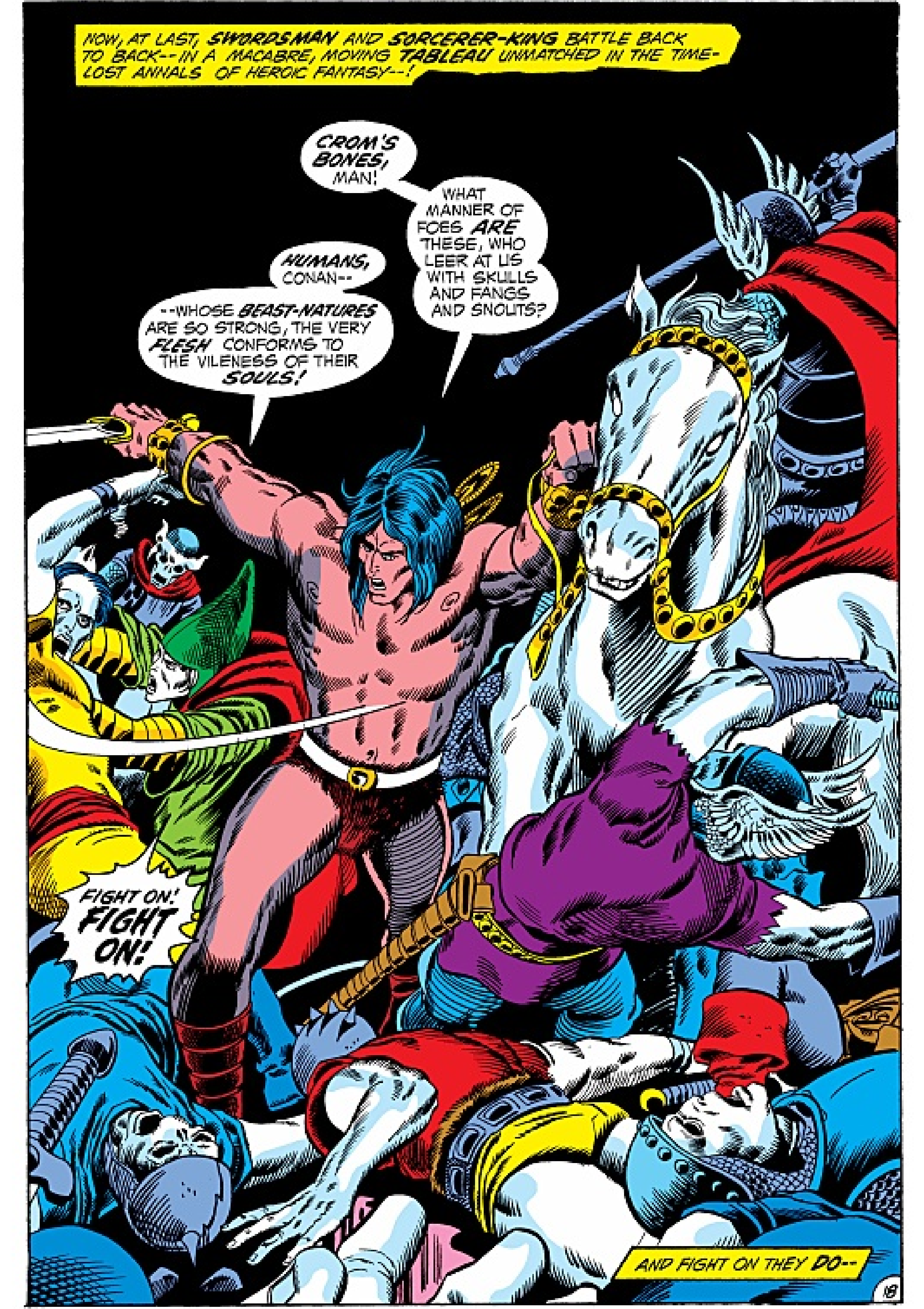

I NEVER MEANT TO *KILL* YOU UP TILL NOW, SAVAGE.
BUT, IF YOU DO NOT *YIELD* AT ONCE--I'LL NOT BE *RESPONSIBLE* FOR THE OUTCOME!
DON'T FEAR ON *MY* ACCOUNT, MAN...
FOR, I'LL MAKE YOUR MOANING BLADE *HOWL* BEFORE--
WHAT? YOUR ARMOR STOPS MY BLADE!?
IS THAT NOT WHAT 'TIS FOR?
TRUE ENOUGH, BUT *ZUKALA* SAID--NEVER MIND!
IF THE SPELL OF A DYING *SORCERER* CANNOT BEST YOUR SWORD-ARM--
--WE'LL SEE WHAT A BARBARIAN'S *GRIP* CAN DO!
CROM!
MY FOREARM CAN MAKE *TWO* OF YOURS...YET *YOUR* GRIP IS MIGHTY AS MY *OWN*.
WHAT MANNER OF MAN DOES XIOMBARG *SEND* AGAINST US--OR ARE YOU RATHER *KULAN-GATH'S* MINION?
I AM *NO* SERVANT OF THE QUEEN OF CHAOS SWORDS--
NOR HAVE I EVER *HEARD* OF THE OTHER YOU NAME.
PERHAPS WE SHOULD *CEASE* OUR FRUITLESS STRUGGLES--AND BANDY WITH *WORDS* A WHILE, INSTEAD.

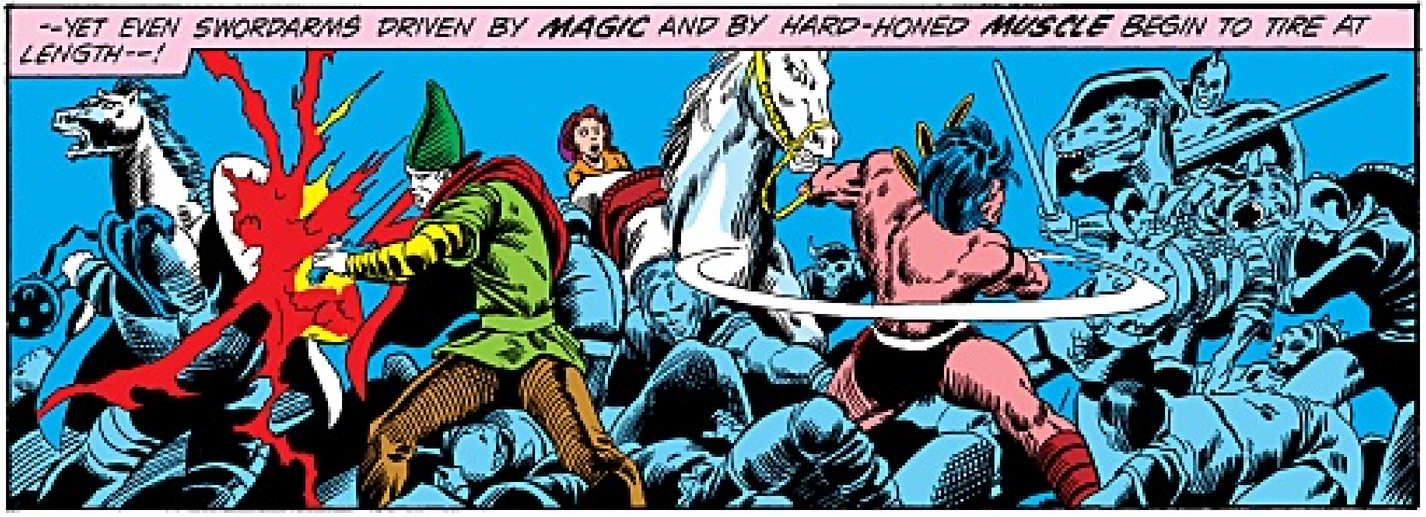

SILENTLY, WARILY, TWO BLADES ARE SLOWLY LOWERED... WHILE GRIM EYES GLARE AT EACH OTHER ACROSS A YAWNING ABYSS...
I AM CONAN, A CIMMERIAN.
YOUR NAME WAS... ELRIC!?
ELRIC--SORCERER-KING OF MELNIBONÉ-- AND, BEFORE YOU HARM YOUR EYES IN STARING AT MY FLESH--
YES, I AM AN ALBINO-- PALE-BLOODED, AND WEAK OF ARM, DID NOT MY MAGIC GIVE ME STRENGTH.
MAGIC-- AND MY GREAT SWORD STORMBRINGER.
I THINK HE MUST SPEAK TRUTH, CONAN.
MY FATHER LEARNED OF ONE SUCH, WHEN HIS MIND'S EYE DID SOAR BETWEEN WORLDS.
NO MATTER. I NEVER HEARD OF HIM.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I SEEK THE TOMB OF ONE OF MY ANCESTORS...
"...THE WIZARDESS TERHALI, WHOSE SEPULCHRE IS SAID TO BE A TREASURE-TROVE OF SORCEROUS LORE.
"MANY A NIGHT I SPENT RECITING THE ANCIENT RUNES TO WAFT ME 'CROSS THE VOID FROM MY WORLD TO YOURS...
"...AND TO THE SIGHING LAKE WE BOTH DO PLAINLY SEEK...!"
ENOUGH. IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN WHY DID YOU SUDDENLY APPEAR AMID THIS GORGE, AND NOT BY THE LAKE YOU SEEK?
SOME UNKNOWN FORCE DIVERTED MY PATH BETWEEN THE PLANES--AND I FOUND MYSELF HERE, INSTEAD.
YOU STILL HAVE NOT TOLD ALL.
WHAT NEED HAVE YOU OF STILL MORE "SORCEROUS LORE"?
DO NOT SEEK, BARBARIAN, TO KNOW ALL THE SECRETS OF ELRIC!
I HAVE TOLD YOU MUCH... AND IF 'TIS NOT SUFFICIENT...
IT'S NOT. THEN--
HOLD THAT NAG STILL, ZEPHRA!
BLAME NOT MY HORSE, BELOVED LOOK--!
14

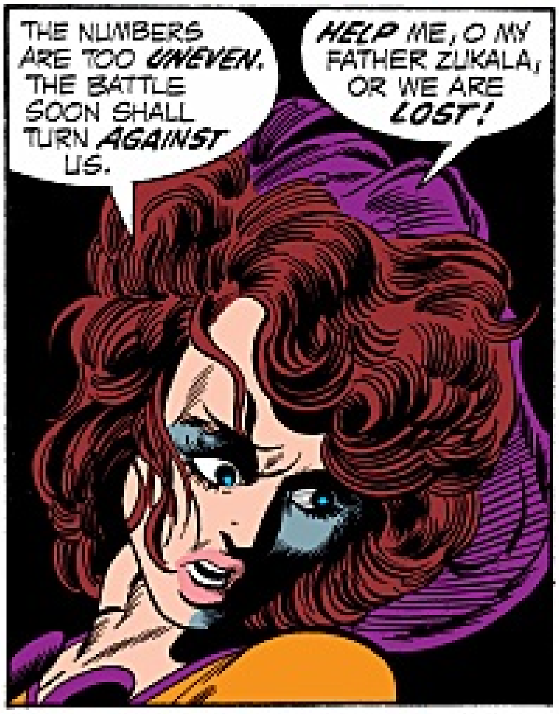

LOOK YONDER!
WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE GODS--?
NOT GODS, WILD-MANE--BUT DEMONS, RATHER!
AYE, CONAN--THEY ARE THE CHAOS PACK OF XIOMBARG WHO STORM THRU THAT GATEWAY IN THE VERY AIR ITSELF.
SEE HOW THEIR LEADER'S SHIELD BURNS WITH THE EIGHT-ARROWED DISC WHICH IS THEIR UNHOLY SYMBOL.
MORE THAN THAT, WOMAN. HE WHO RIDES AT THE HEAD OF THE HORDE IS--
--PRINCE GAYNOR THE DAMNED!
AYE, ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ.
I KNOW NOT THE SOMBRE FATE WHICH HAS BROUGHT YOU HITHER TO PERISH--
BUT PERISH ALL OF YOU SHALL!
TO A MAN--TO A WOMAN--SLAY THEM!!
WELL, BARBARIAN, IT SEEMS WE BATTLE SIDE BY SIDE, DESPITE OUR VARIANT PHILOSOPHIES.
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT, PALE-BLOOD...

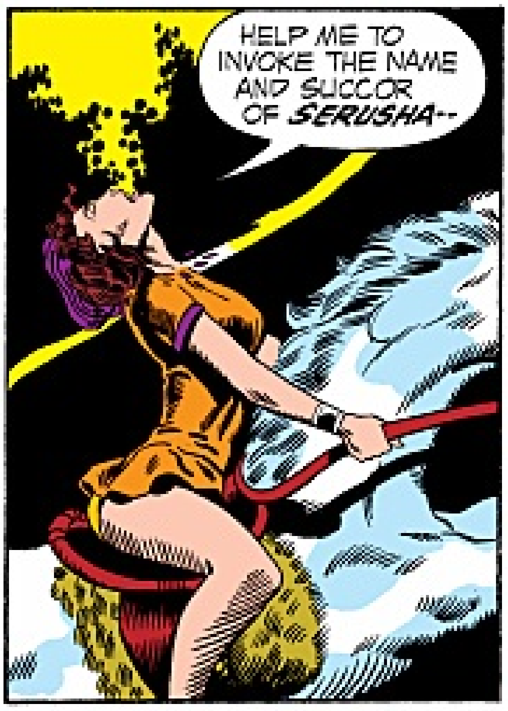

BUT I *DO* KNOW THAT, IF I DIE...
...I'LL NOT TREAD THAT SOMBRE PATH *ALONE!*
WELL SAID, BARBARIAN!
INDEED, WE'LL *BOTH* HAVE PLENTY OF COMPANY ON THE WELL-TRAVELED ROAD TO HELL!
YET, SLAYING *LACKEYS*-- OR EVEN DYING OURSELVES-- WILL DO NAUGHT TO OUR TWIN *MISSIONS*.
ASIDE, WHELPS! WHERE IS *PRINCE GAYNOR?*
HERE, SORCERER-KING...
...AND SOON YOU SHALL WISH HE WERE *NOT*.
UP, MARDUK! PERHAPS A TASTE OF MY *MACE* WILL ASSUAGE THE HUNGER OF THE MELNIBONEAN'S SWORD.
CONAN! YOU MUST *HELP* ELRIC AGAINST UNHOLY GAYNOR.
FROM WHAT I'VE GLIMPSED, THE MAN CAN FEND FOR *HIMSELF*.
AND *MORE*-- I'M *BUSY!*

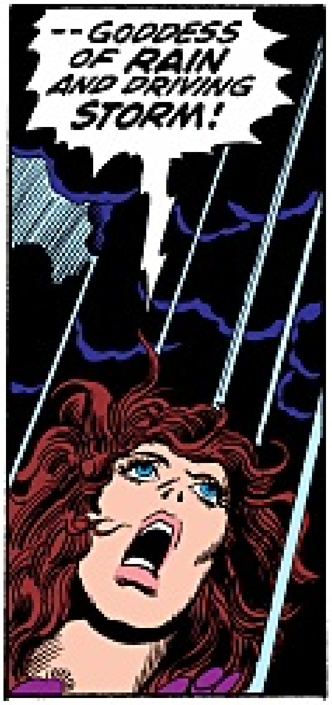

ON YOUR GUARD, ALBINO!
THIS DARK NIGHT, YOURS WILL BE THE DEATH THAT BUYS MY PASSAGE TO SWEET OBLIVION!
SEEK OUT SOME OTHER FOOL TO PURCHASE YOUR FREEDOM, GAYNOR...
YOU'LL GET NO HELP FROM ELRIC OF MELNIBONE!
WHAT? NO MORE BRIGHT WORDS, STRUNG TOGETHER LIKE PEARLS ON A GAUDY NECKLACE?
PERHAPS YOU'LL SING A SWEETER SONG--
--WHEN STORMBRINGER HAS REAVED YOUR SHIELD LIKE AN OVERRIPE MELON!
WATCH YOUR BACKSIDE, PALE-SKIN!
IT APPEARS A BARBARIAN MAY HAVE HIS USES, AFTER ALL.
I NEVER DOUBTED IT, WILD-MANE.

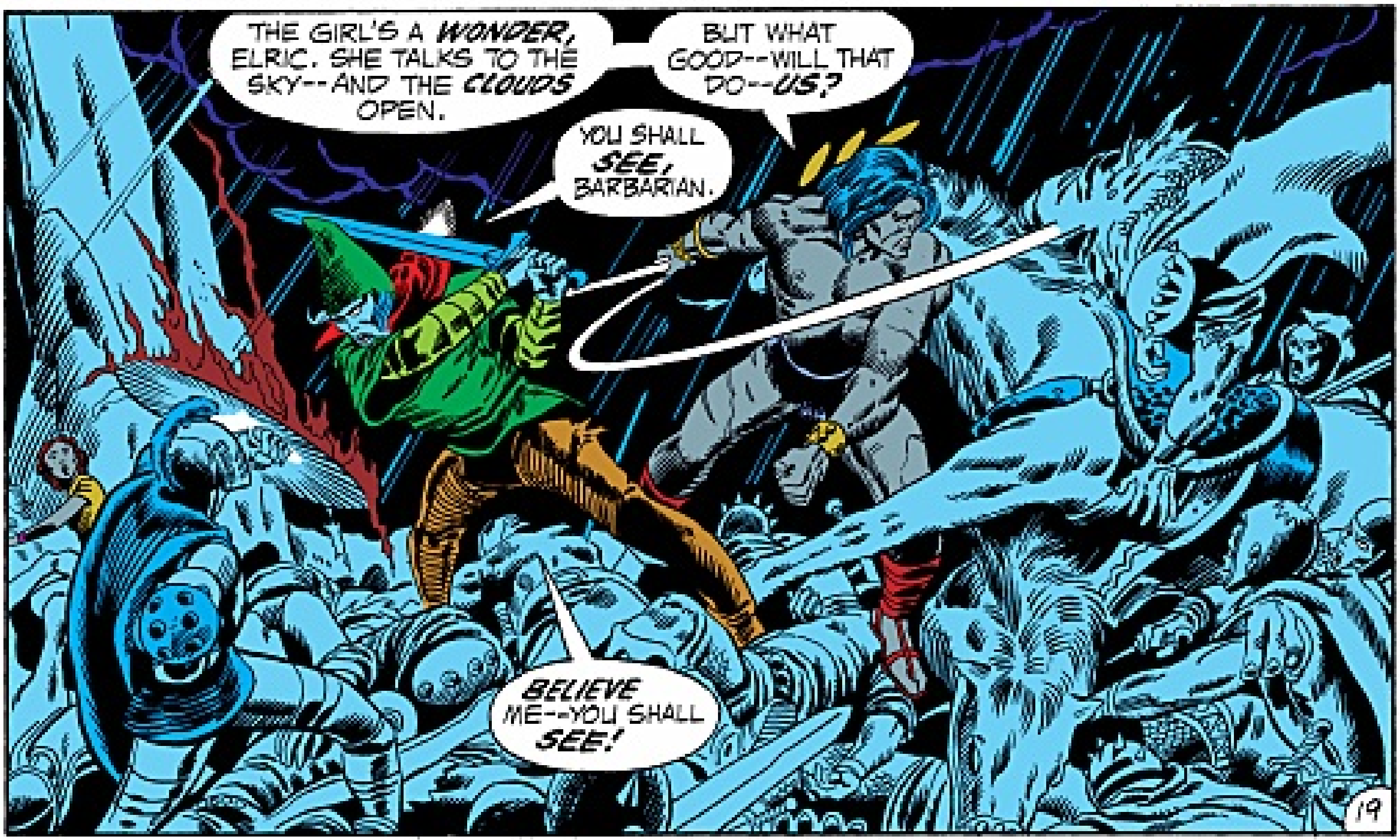

NOW, AT LAST, SWORDSMAN AND SORCERER-KING BATTLE BACK TO BACK--IN A MACABRE, MOVING TABLEAU UNMATCHED IN THE TIME-LOST ANNALS OF HEROIC FANTASY--!
CROM'S BONES, MAN!
WHAT MANNER OF FOES ARE THESE, WHO LEER AT US WITH SKULLS AND FANGS AND SNOUTS?
HUMANS, CONAN--
--WHOSE BEAST-NATURES ARE SO STRONG, THE VERY FLESH CONFORMS TO THE VILENESS OF THEIR SOULS!
FIGHT ON! FIGHT ON!
AND FIGHT ON THEY DO--

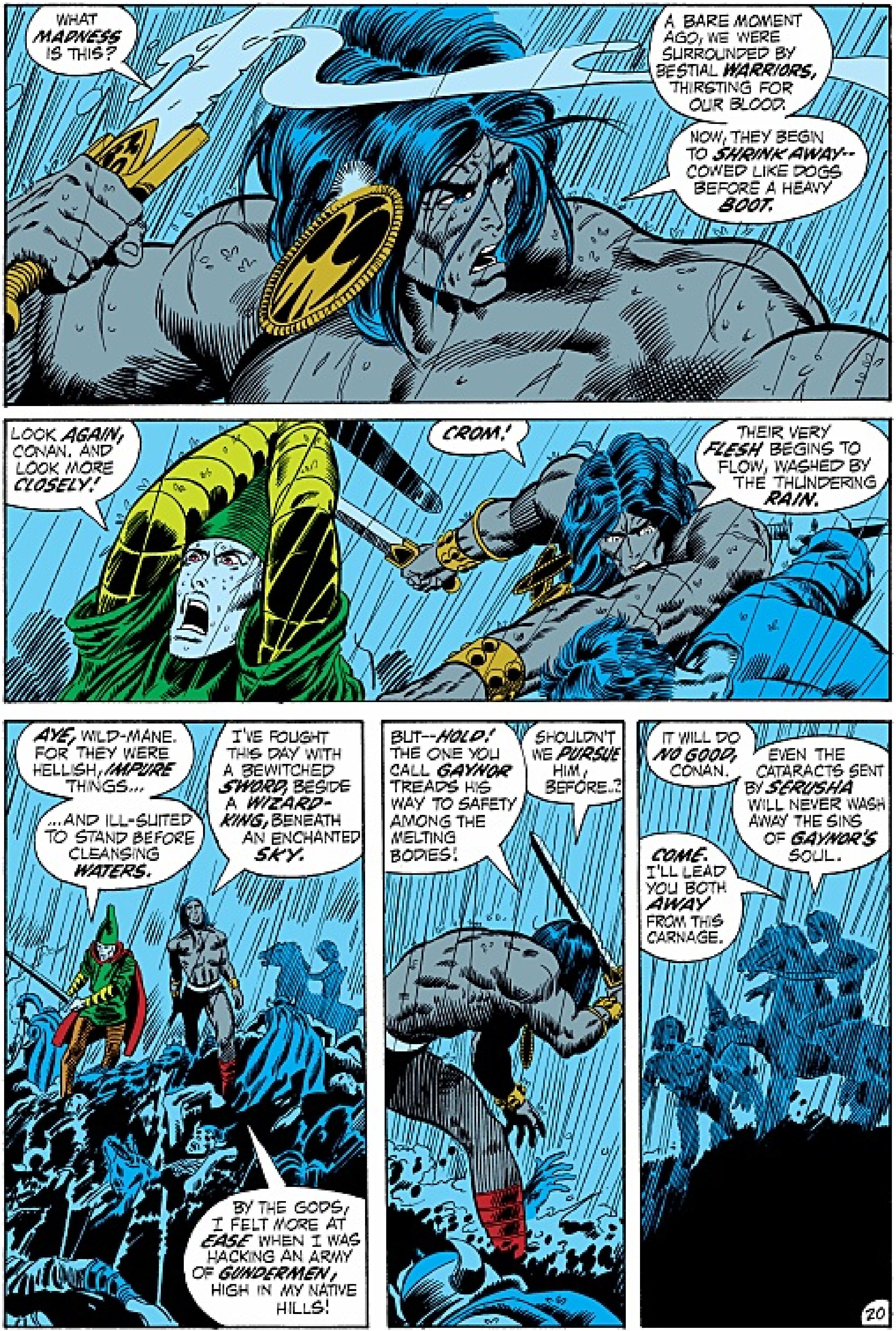

--YET EVEN SWORDARMS DRIVEN BY *MAGIC* AND BY HARD-HONED *MUSCLE* BEGIN TO TIRE AT LENGTH--!

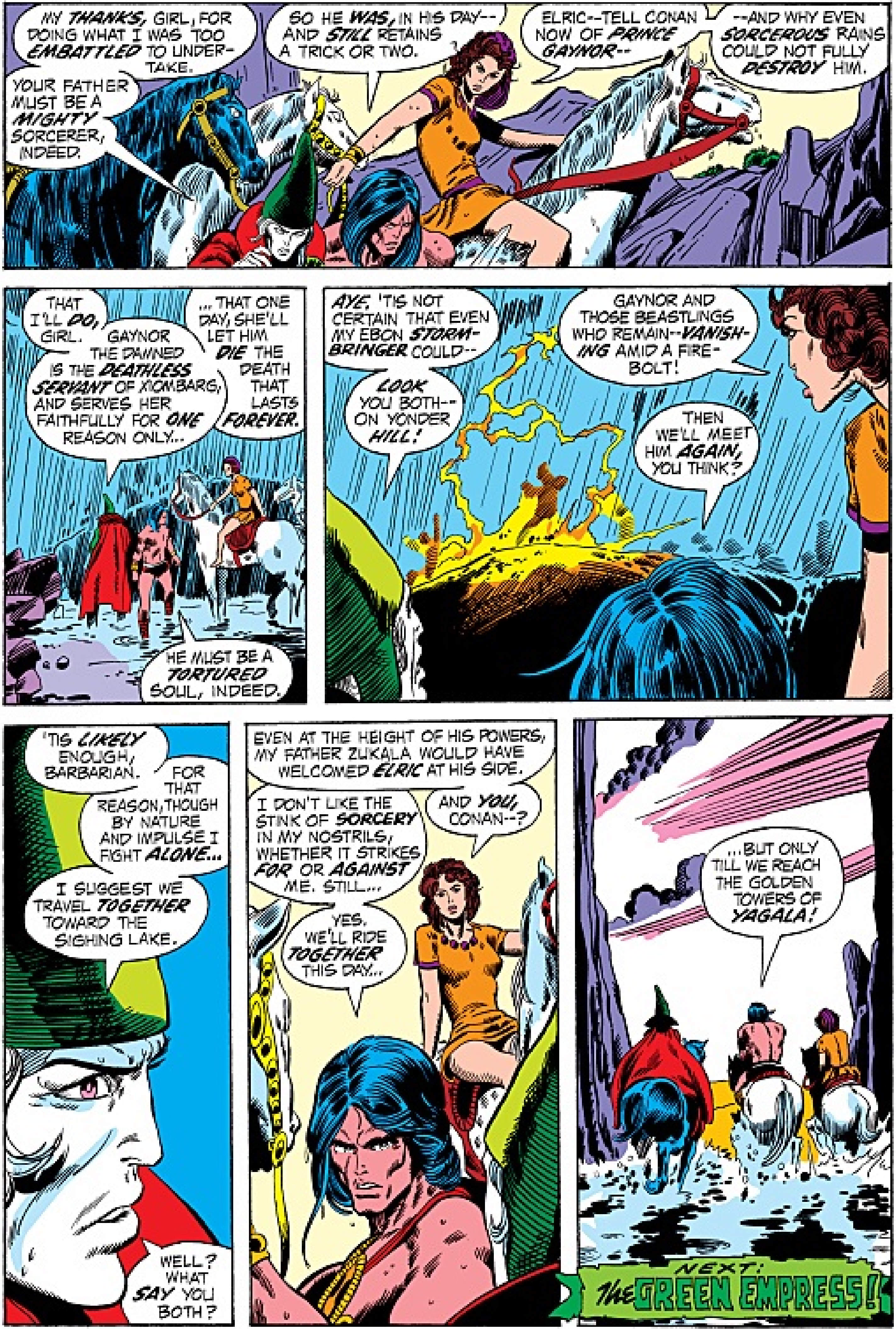

THE NUMBERS ARE TOO *UNEVEN*. THE BATTLE SOON SHALL TURN *AGAINST* US.
HELP ME, O MY FATHER ZUKALA, OR WE ARE *LOST*!

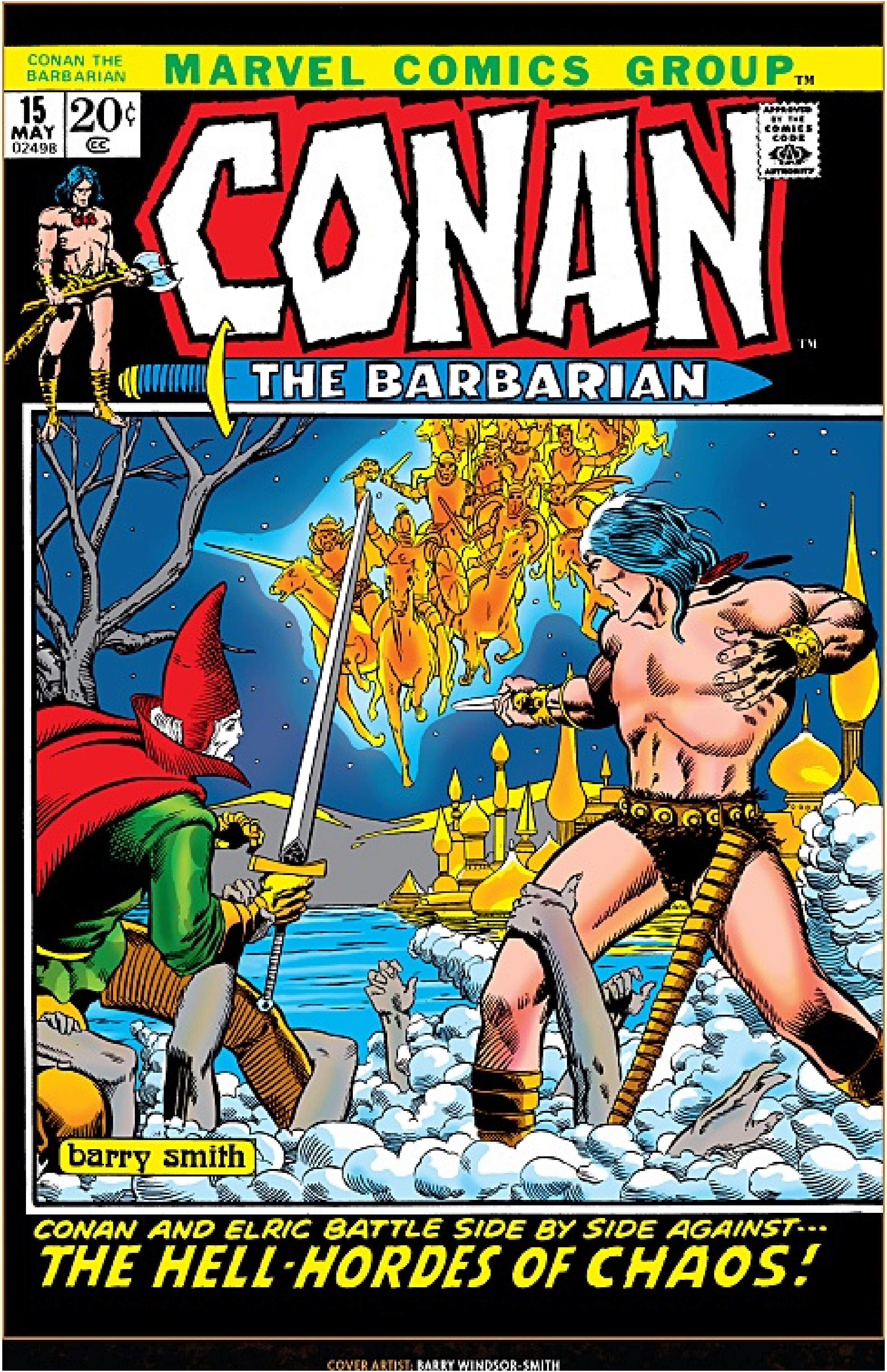

HELP ME TO INVOKE THE NAME AND SUCCOR OF *SERUSHA*--


--GODDESS OF RAIN AND DRIVING STORM!


THE GIRL'S A *WONDER*, ELRIC. SHE TALKS TO THE SKY--AND THE *CLOUDS* OPEN.
BUT WHAT GOOD--WILL THAT DO--*US*?
YOU SHALL *SEE*, BARBARIAN.
BELIEVE ME--YOU SHALL *SEE*!


WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?
A BARE MOMENT AGO, WE WERE SURROUNDED BY BESTIAL WARRIORS, THIRSTING FOR OUR BLOOD.
NOW, THEY BEGIN TO SHRINK AWAY--COWED LIKE DOGS BEFORE A HEAVY BOOT.
LOOK AGAIN, CONAN. AND LOOK MORE CLOSELY!
CROM!
THEIR VERY FLESH BEGINS TO FLOW, WASHED BY THE THUNDERING RAIN.
AYE, WILD-MANE. FOR THEY WERE HELLISH, IMPURE THINGS...
...AND ILL-SUITED TO STAND BEFORE CLEANSING WATERS.
I'VE FOUGHT THIS DAY WITH A BEWITCHED SWORD, BESIDE A WIZARD-KING, BENEATH AN ENCHANTED SKY.
BY THE GODS, I FELT MORE AT EASE WHEN I WAS HACKING AN ARMY OF GUNDERMEN, HIGH IN MY NATIVE HILLS!
BUT--HOLD! THE ONE YOU CALL GAYNOR TREADS HIS WAY TO SAFETY AMONG THE MELTING BODIES!
SHOULDN'T WE PURSUE HIM, BEFORE..?
IT WILL DO NO GOOD, CONAN.
EVEN THE CATARACTS SENT BY SERUSHA WILL NEVER WASH AWAY THE SINS OF GAYNOR'S SOUL.
COME. I'LL LEAD YOU BOTH AWAY FROM THIS CARNAGE.


MY THANKS, GIRL, FOR DOING WHAT I WAS TOO EMBATTLED TO UNDERTAKE.
YOUR FATHER MUST BE A MIGHTY SORCERER, INDEED.
SO HE WAS, IN HIS DAY-- AND STILL RETAINS A TRICK OR TWO.
ELRIC--TELL CONAN NOW OF PRINCE GAYNOR--
--AND WHY EVEN SORCEROUS RAINS COULD NOT FULLY DESTROY HIM.
THAT I'LL DO, GIRL.
GAYNOR THE DAMNED IS THE DEATHLESS SERVANT OF XIOMBARG, AND SERVES HER FAITHFULLY FOR ONE REASON ONLY...
...THAT ONE DAY, SHE'LL LET HIM DIE THE DEATH THAT LASTS FOREVER.
HE MUST BE A TORTURED SOUL, INDEED.
AYE, 'TIS NOT CERTAIN THAT EVEN MY EBON STORMBRINGER COULD--
LOOK YOU BOTH-- ON YONDER HILL!
GAYNOR AND THOSE BEASTLINGS WHO REMAIN--VANISHING AMID A FIRE-BOLT!
THEN WE'LL MEET HIM AGAIN, YOU THINK?
'TIS LIKELY ENOUGH, BARBARIAN.
FOR THAT REASON, THOUGH BY NATURE AND IMPULSE I FIGHT ALONE...
I SUGGEST WE TRAVEL TOGETHER TOWARD THE SIGHING LAKE.
WELL? WHAT SAY YOU BOTH?
EVEN AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS POWERS, MY FATHER ZUKALA WOULD HAVE WELCOMED ELRIC AT HIS SIDE.
AND YOU, CONAN--?
I DON'T LIKE THE STINK OF SORCERY IN MY NOSTRILS, WHETHER IT STRIKES FOR OR AGAINST ME. STILL...
YES. WE'LL RIDE TOGETHER THIS DAY...
...BUT ONLY TILL WE REACH THE GOLDEN TOWERS OF YAGALA!
NEXT: The GREEN EMPRESS!


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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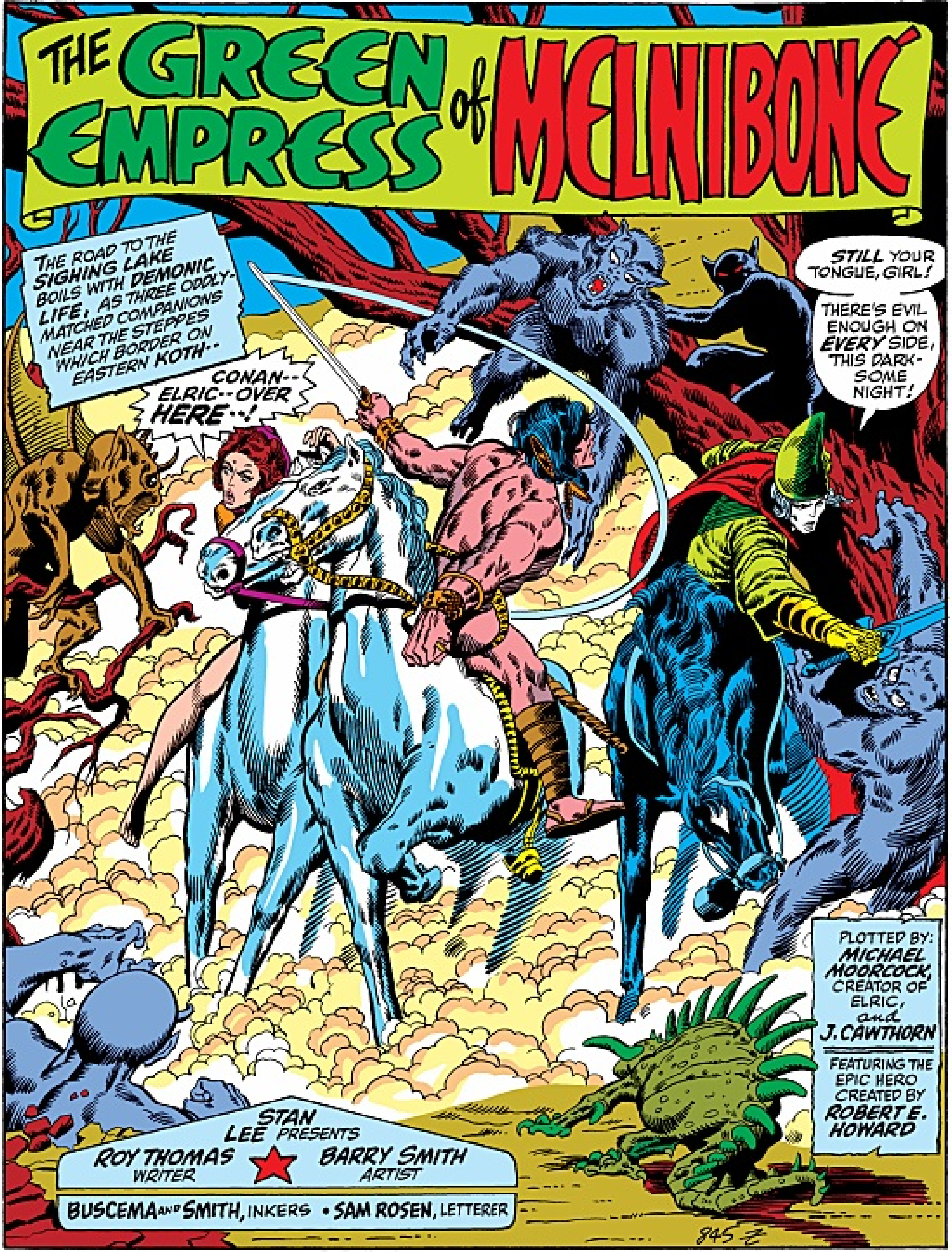
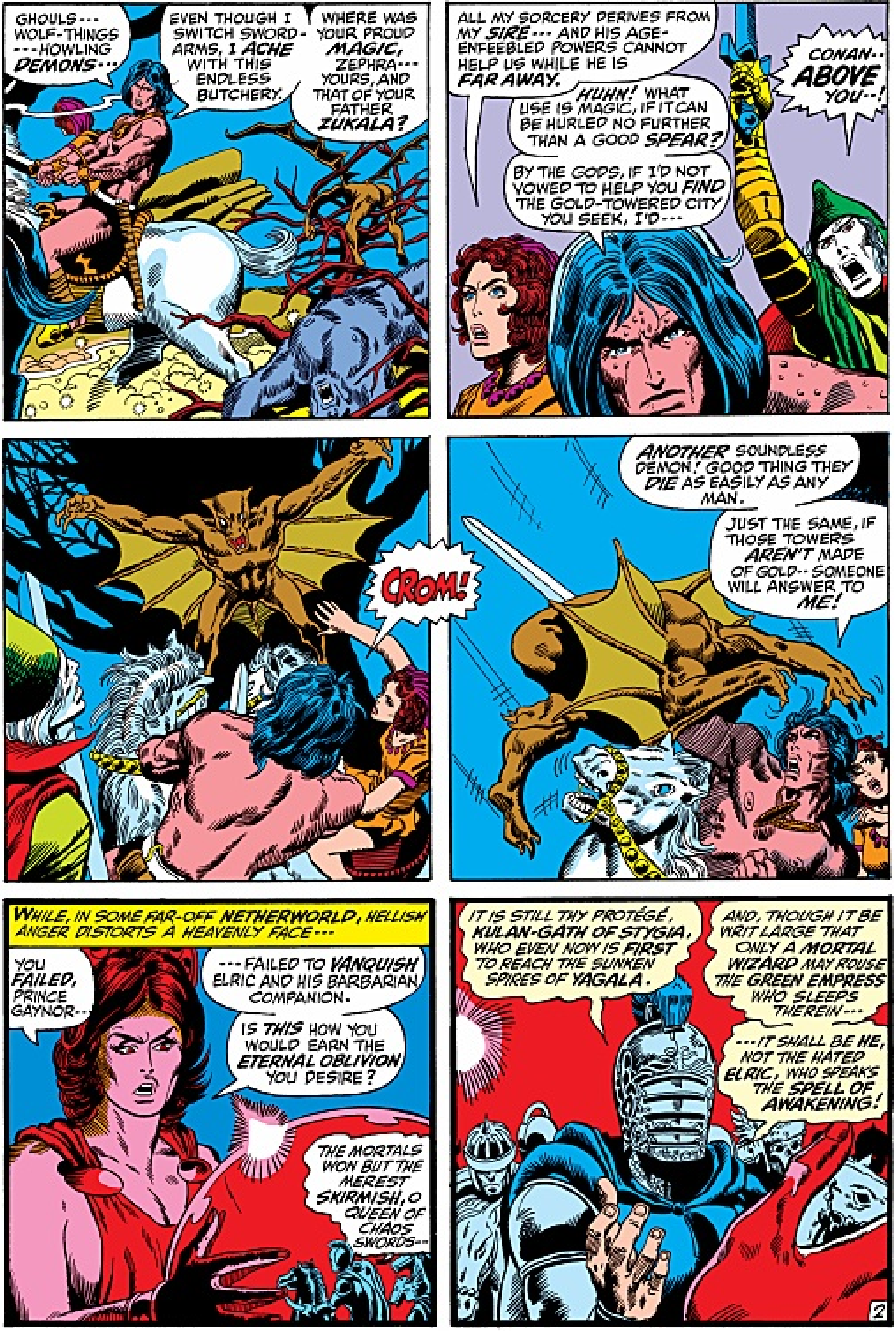
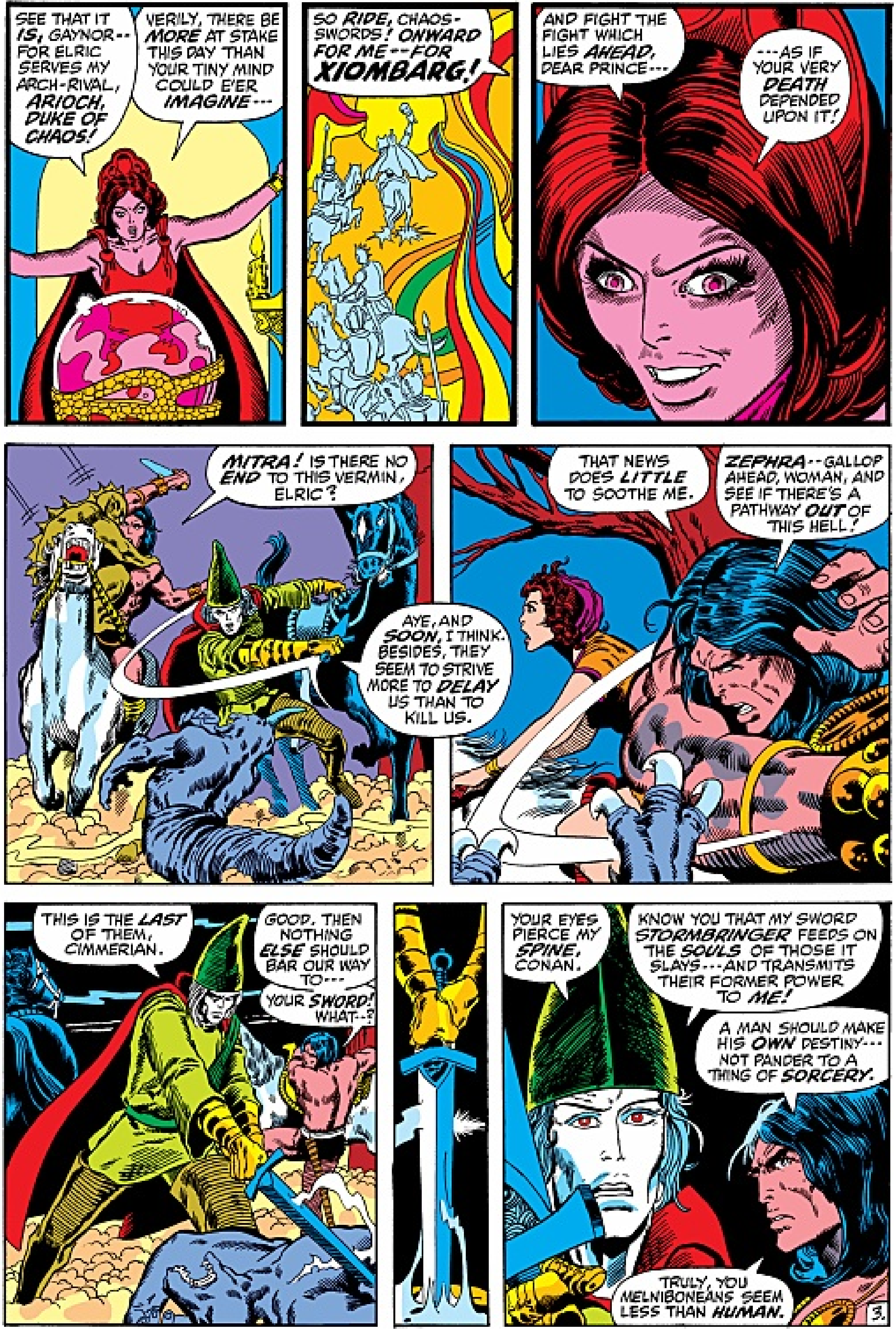
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
™
barry smith
CONAN AND ELRIC BATTLE SIDE BY SIDE AGAINST---
THE HELL-HORDES OF CHAOS!

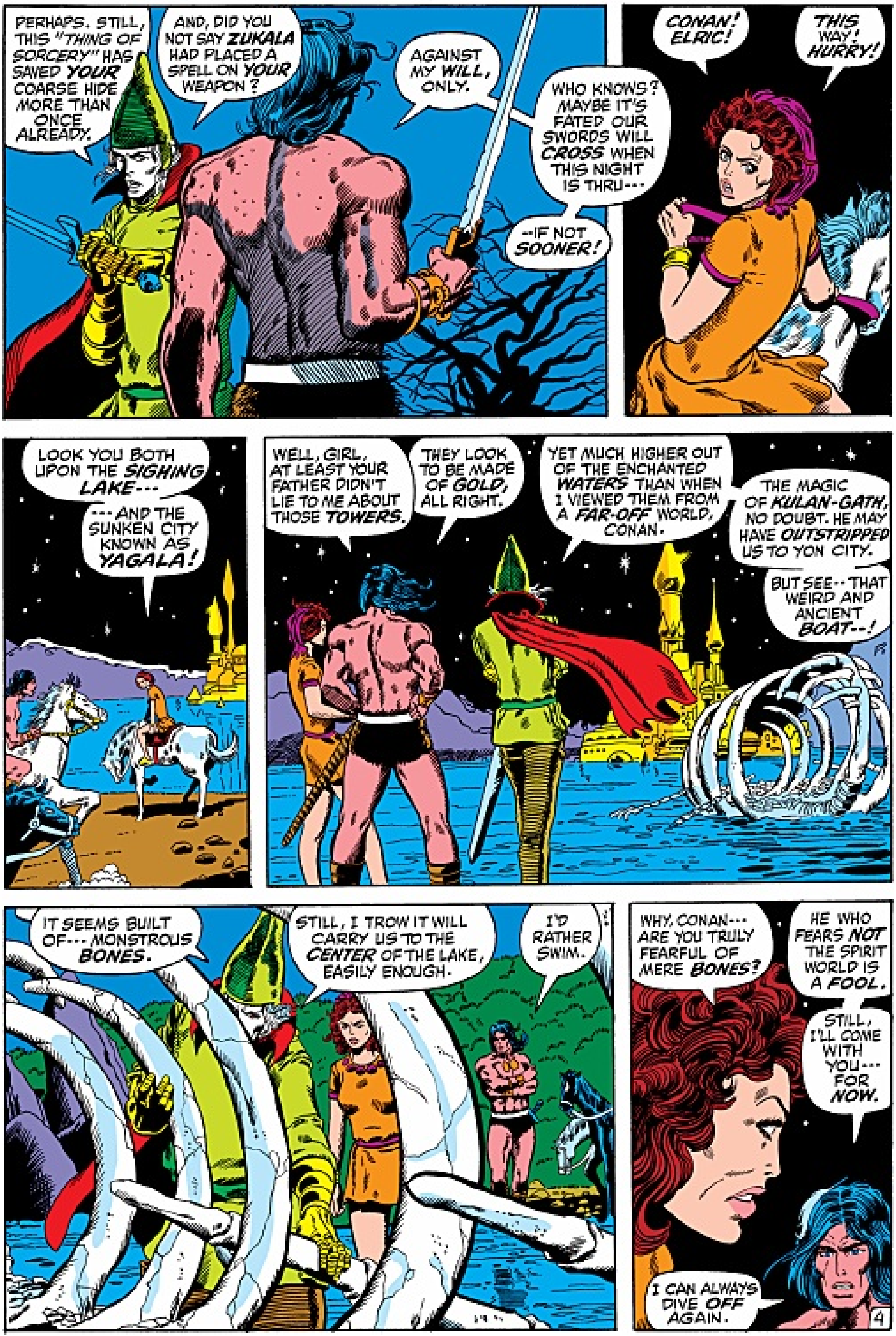
COVER ARTIST: BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

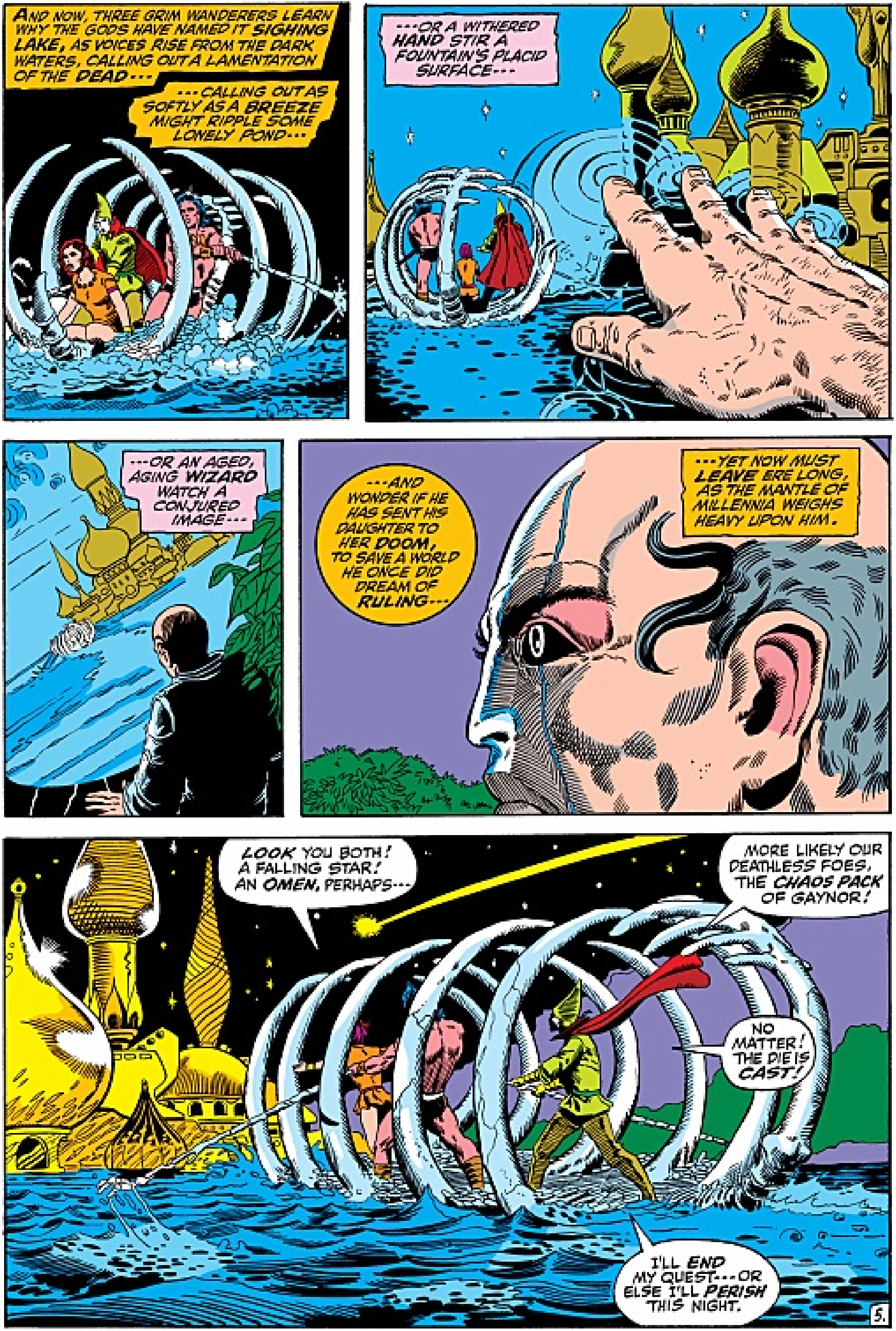
CONAN THE BARBARIAN!™

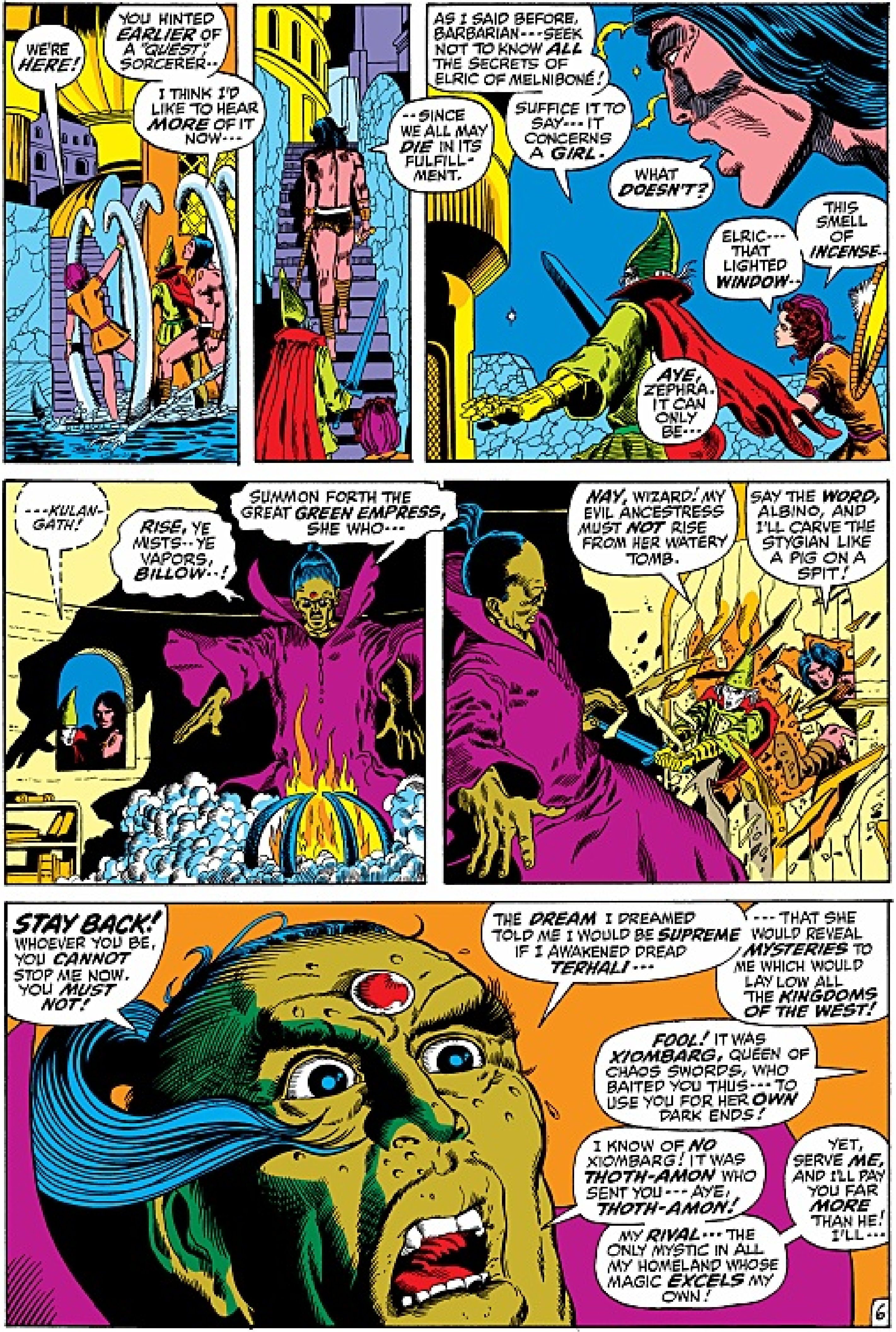

THE GREEN EMPRESS of MELNIBONÉ
THE ROAD TO THE SIGHING LAKE BOILS WITH DEMONIC LIFE, AS THREE ODDLY-MATCHED COMPANIONS NEAR THE STEPPES WHICH BORDER ON EASTERN KOTH--
CONAN-- ELRIC--OVER HERE--!
STILL YOUR TONGUE, GIRL!
THERE'S EVIL ENOUGH ON EVERY SIDE, THIS DARK-SOME NIGHT!
PLOTTED BY: MICHAEL MOORCOCK, CREATOR OF ELRIC, and J. CAWTHORN
FEATURING THE EPIC HERO CREATED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD
STAN LEE PRESENTS
ROY THOMAS WRITER
BARRY SMITH ARTIST
BUSCEMA AND SMITH, INKERS • SAM ROSEN, LETTERER

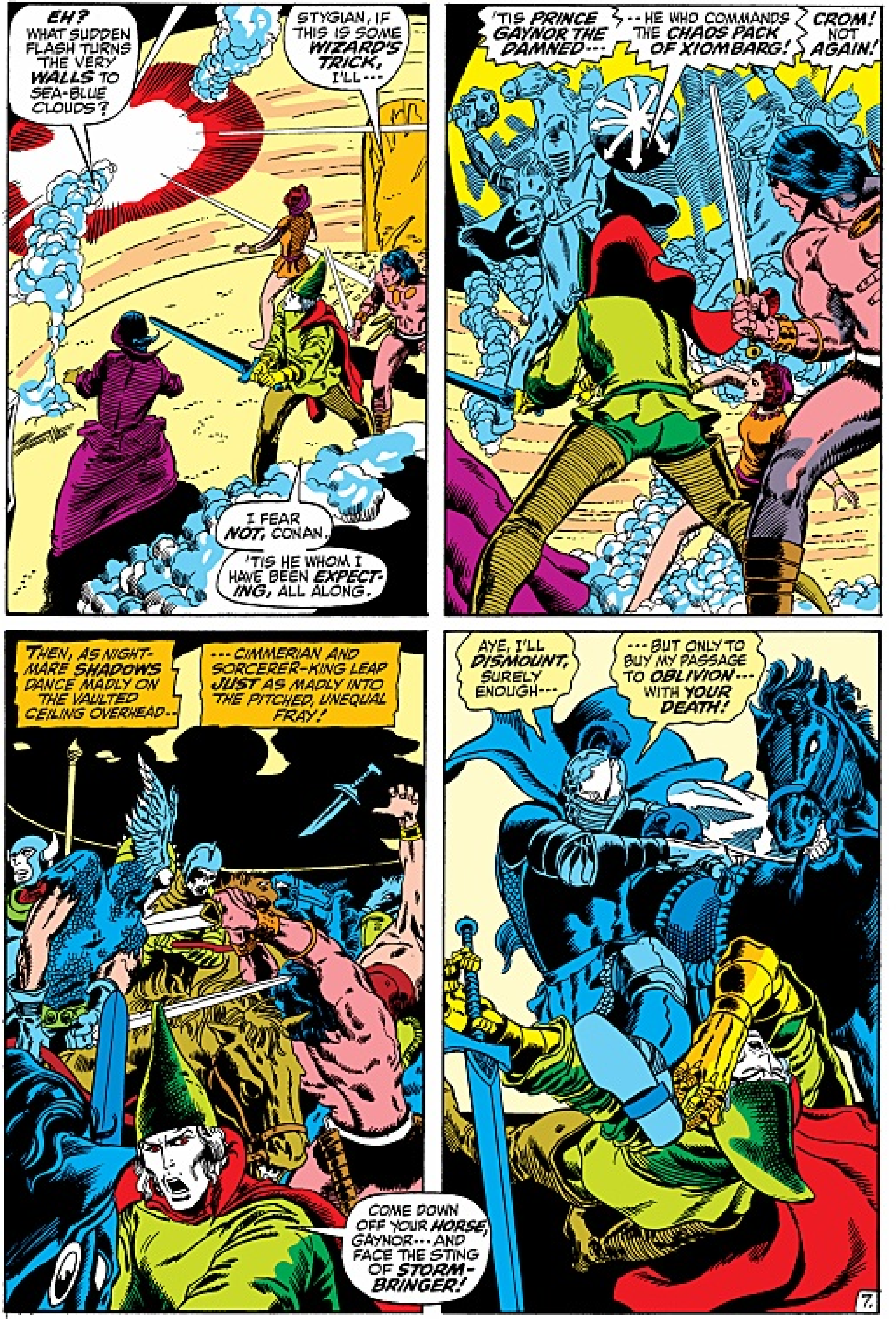

GHOULS--- WOLF-THINGS ---HOWLING DEMONS---
EVEN THOUGH I SWITCH SWORD-ARMS, I ACHE WITH THIS ENDLESS BUTCHERY.
WHERE WAS YOUR PROUD MAGIC, ZEPHRA--- YOURS, AND THAT OF YOUR FATHER ZUKALA?
ALL MY SORCERY DERIVES FROM MY SIRE --- AND HIS AGE-ENFEEBLED POWERS CANNOT HELP US WHILE HE IS FAR AWAY.
HUHN! WHAT USE IS MAGIC, IF IT CAN BE HURLED NO FURTHER THAN A GOOD SPEAR?
BY THE GODS, IF I'D NOT VOWED TO HELP YOU FIND THE GOLD-TOWERED CITY YOU SEEK, I'D---
CONAN-- ABOVE YOU--!
CROM!
ANOTHER SOUNDLESS DEMON! GOOD THING THEY DIE AS EASILY AS ANY MAN.
JUST THE SAME, IF THOSE TOWERS AREN'T MADE OF GOLD-- SOMEONE WILL ANSWER TO ME!
WHILE, IN SOME FAR-OFF NETHERWORLD, HELLISH ANGER DISTORTS A HEAVENLY FACE---
YOU FAILED, PRINCE GAYNOR--
---FAILED TO VANQUISH ELRIC AND HIS BARBARIAN COMPANION.
IS THIS HOW YOU WOULD EARN THE ETERNAL OBLIVION YOU DESIRE?
THE MORTALS WON BUT THE MEREST SKIRMISH, O QUEEN OF CHAOS SWORDS--
IT IS STILL THY PROTÉGÉ, KULAN-GATH OF STYGIA, WHO EVEN NOW IS FIRST TO REACH THE SUNKEN SPIRES OF YAGALA.
AND, THOUGH IT BE WRIT LARGE THAT ONLY A MORTAL WIZARD MAY ROUSE THE GREEN EMPRESS WHO SLEEPS THEREIN---
---IT SHALL BE HE, NOT THE HATED ELRIC, WHO SPEAKS THE SPELL OF AWAKENING!

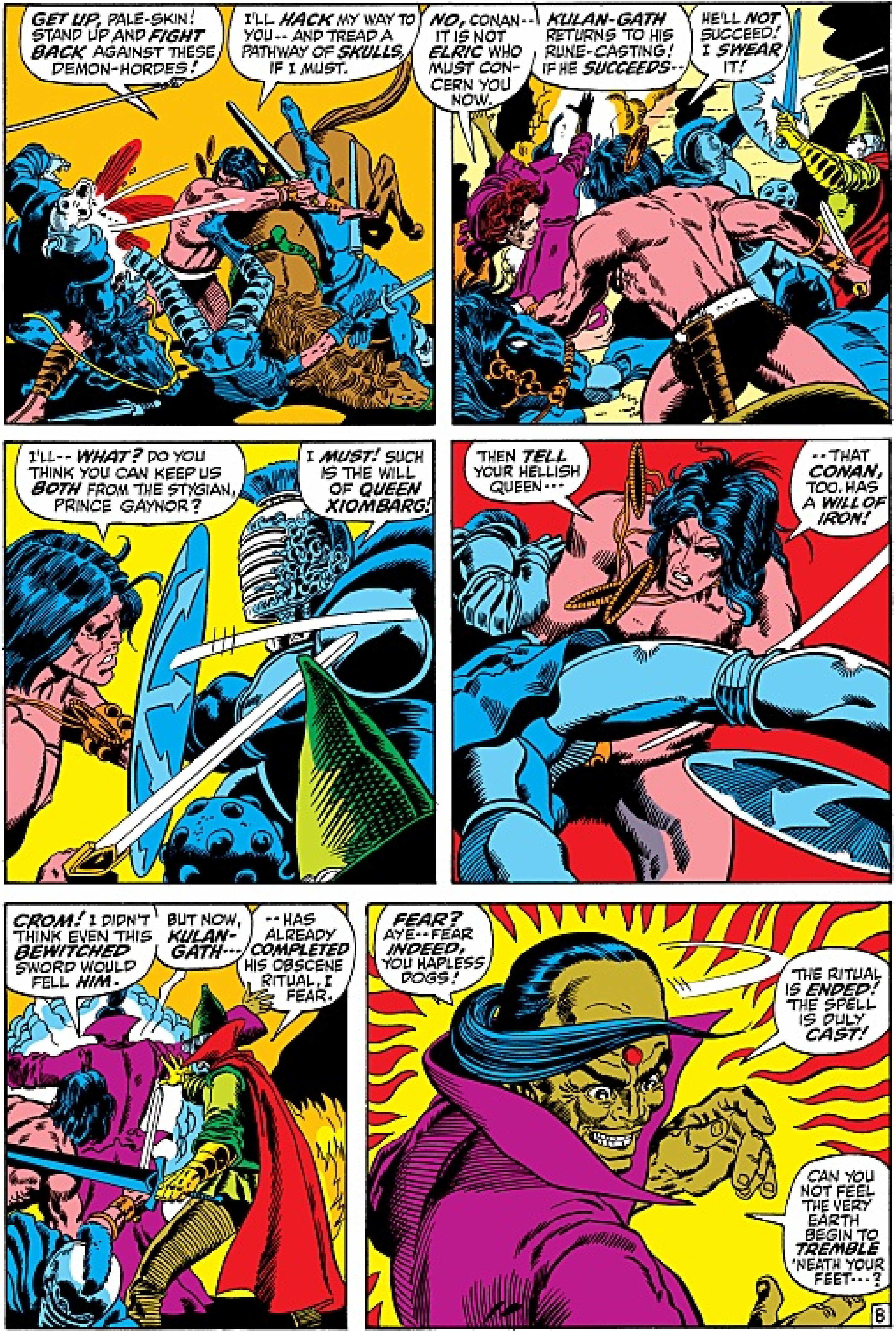

SEE THAT IT *IS*, GAYNOR-- FOR ELRIC SERVES MY ARCH-RIVAL, *ARIOCH, DUKE OF CHAOS!*
VERILY, THERE BE *MORE* AT STAKE THIS DAY THAN YOUR TINY MIND COULD E'ER *IMAGINE*---
SO *RIDE*, CHAOS-SWORDS! *ONWARD FOR ME--FOR XIOMBARG!*
AND FIGHT THE FIGHT WHICH LIES *AHEAD*, DEAR PRINCE---
---AS IF YOUR VERY *DEATH* DEPENDED UPON IT!
MITRA! IS THERE NO *END* TO THIS VERMIN, ELRIC?
AYE, AND *SOON*, I THINK. BESIDES, THEY SEEM TO STRIVE MORE TO *DELAY* US THAN TO KILL US.
THAT NEWS DOES *LITTLE* TO SOOTHE ME.
ZEPHRA--GALLOP AHEAD, WOMAN, AND SEE IF THERE'S A PATHWAY *OUT* OF THIS HELL!
THIS IS THE *LAST* OF THEM, CIMMERIAN.
GOOD. THEN NOTHING *ELSE* SHOULD BAR OUR WAY TO---
YOUR *SWORD!* WHAT--?
YOUR EYES PIERCE MY *SPINE*, CONAN.
KNOW YOU THAT MY SWORD *STORMBRINGER* FEEDS ON THE *SOULS* OF THOSE IT SLAYS---AND TRANSMITS THEIR FORMER POWER TO *ME!*
A MAN SHOULD MAKE HIS *OWN* DESTINY--- NOT PANDER TO A THING OF *SORCERY*.
TRULY, YOU MELNIBONEANS SEEM LESS THAN *HUMAN*.
3.

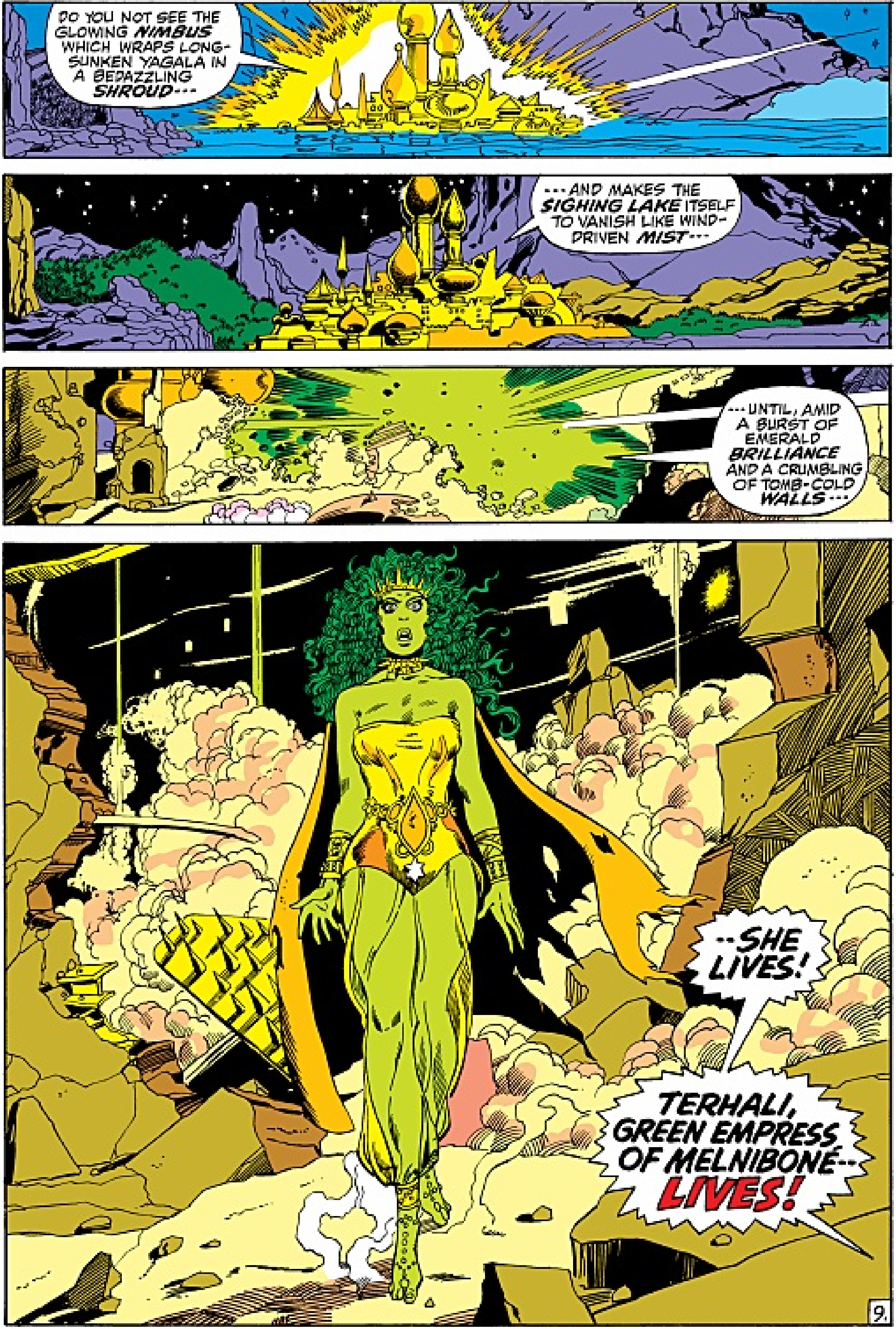

PERHAPS. STILL, THIS "THING OF SORCERY" HAS SAVED YOUR COARSE HIDE MORE THAN ONCE ALREADY.
AND, DID YOU NOT SAY ZUKALA HAD PLACED A SPELL ON YOUR WEAPON?
AGAINST MY WILL, ONLY.
WHO KNOWS? MAYBE IT'S FATED OUR SWORDS WILL CROSS WHEN THIS NIGHT IS THRU---
--IF NOT SOONER!
CONAN! ELRIC!
THIS WAY! HURRY!
LOOK YOU BOTH UPON THE SIGHING LAKE---
---AND THE SUNKEN CITY KNOWN AS YAGALA!
WELL, GIRL, AT LEAST YOUR FATHER DIDN'T LIE TO ME ABOUT THOSE TOWERS.
THEY LOOK TO BE MADE OF GOLD, ALL RIGHT.
YET MUCH HIGHER OUT OF THE ENCHANTED WATERS THAN WHEN I VIEWED THEM FROM A FAR-OFF WORLD, CONAN.
THE MAGIC OF KULAN-GATH, NO DOUBT. HE MAY HAVE OUTSTRIPPED US TO YON CITY.
BUT SEE--THAT WEIRD AND ANCIENT BOAT--!
IT SEEMS BUILT OF---MONSTROUS BONES.
STILL, I TROW IT WILL CARRY US TO THE CENTER OF THE LAKE, EASILY ENOUGH.
I'D RATHER SWIM.
WHY, CONAN---ARE YOU TRULY FEARFUL OF MERE BONES?
HE WHO FEARS NOT THE SPIRIT WORLD IS A FOOL.
STILL, I'LL COME WITH YOU---FOR NOW.
I CAN ALWAYS DIVE OFF AGAIN.

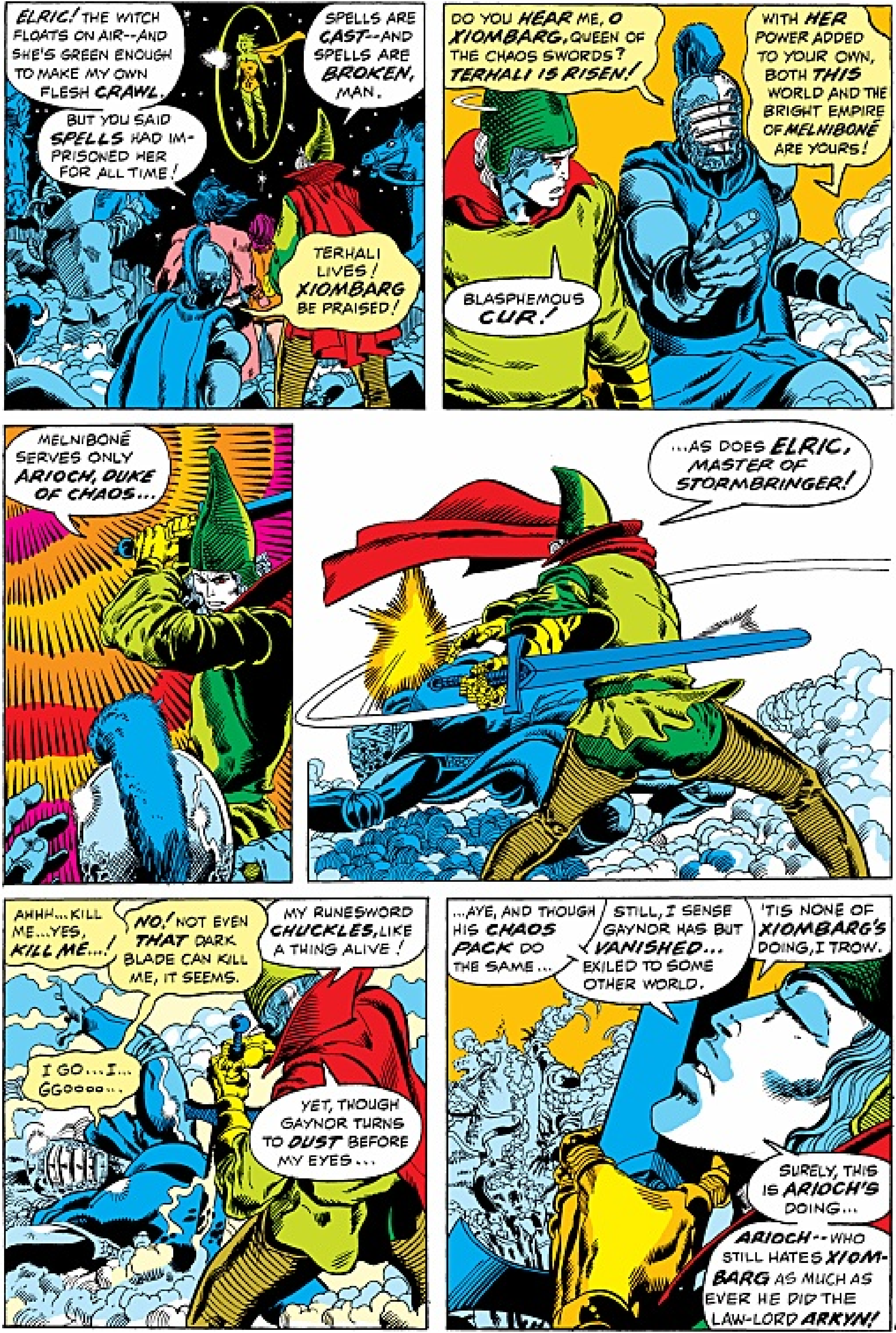

AND NOW, THREE GRIM WANDERERS LEARN WHY THE GODS HAVE NAMED IT SIGHING LAKE, AS VOICES RISE FROM THE DARK WATERS, CALLING OUT A LAMENTATION OF THE DEAD---
---CALLING OUT AS SOFTLY AS A BREEZE MIGHT RIPPLE SOME LONELY POND---
---OR A WITHERED HAND STIR A FOUNTAIN'S PLACID SURFACE---
---OR AN AGED, AGING WIZARD WATCH A CONJURED IMAGE---
---AND WONDER IF HE HAS SENT HIS DAUGHTER TO HER DOOM, TO SAVE A WORLD HE ONCE DID DREAM OF RULING---
---YET NOW MUST LEAVE ERE LONG, AS THE MANTLE OF MILLENNIA WEIGHS HEAVY UPON HIM.
LOOK YOU BOTH! A FALLING STAR! AN OMEN, PERHAPS---
MORE LIKELY OUR DEATHLESS FOES, THE CHAOS PACK OF GAYNOR!
NO MATTER! THE DIE IS CAST!
I'LL END MY QUEST---OR ELSE I'LL PERISH THIS NIGHT.

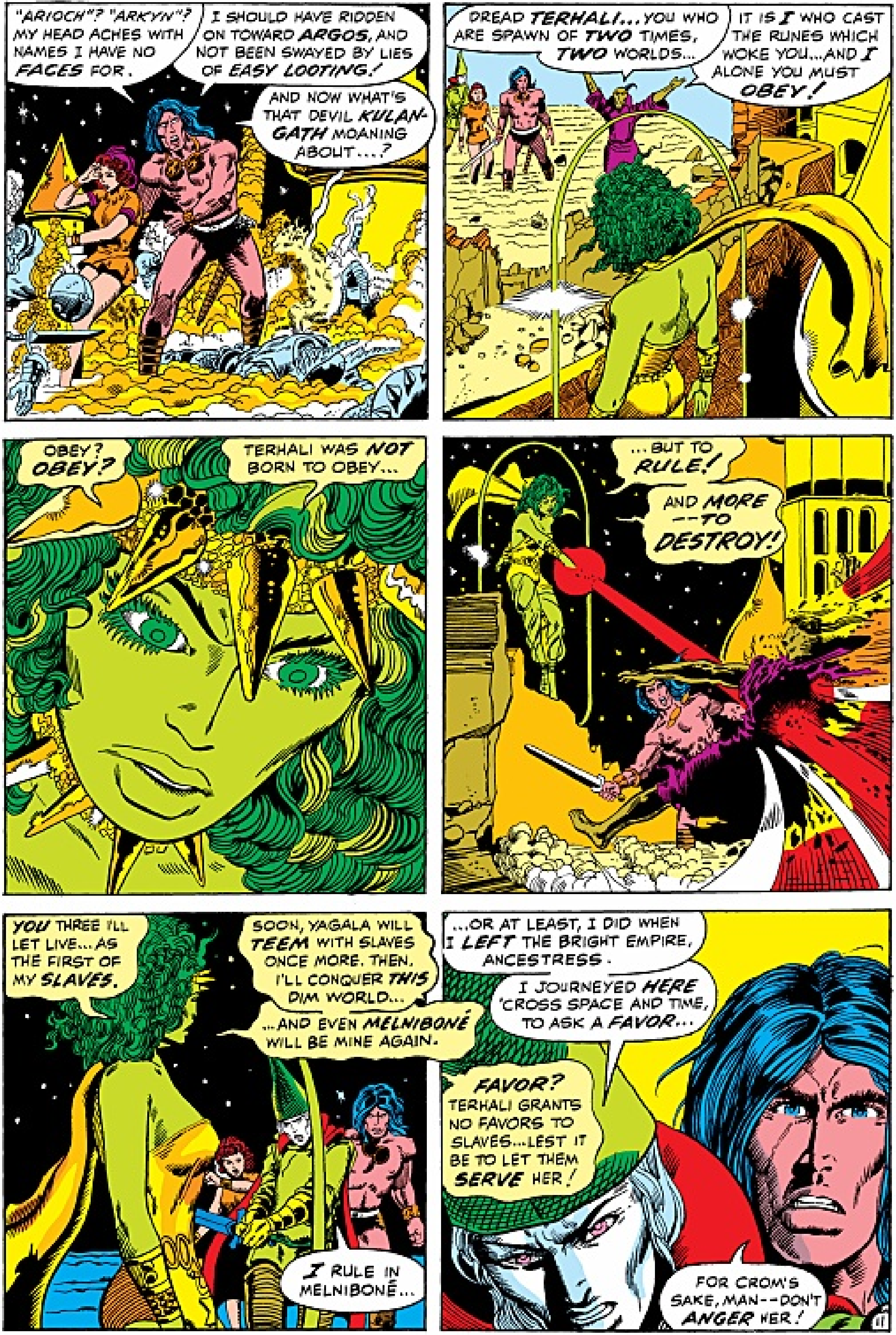

WE'RE HERE!
YOU HINTED EARLIER OF A "QUEST," SORCERER--
I THINK I'D LIKE TO HEAR MORE OF IT NOW---
--SINCE WE ALL MAY DIE IN ITS FULFILL-MENT.
AS I SAID BEFORE, BARBARIAN---SEEK NOT TO KNOW ALL THE SECRETS OF ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ!
SUFFICE IT TO SAY---IT CONCERNS A GIRL.
WHAT DOESN'T?
ELRIC---THAT LIGHTED WINDOW--
THIS SMELL OF INCENSE--
AYE, ZEPHRA. IT CAN ONLY BE---
---KULAN-GATH!
RISE, YE MISTS--YE VAPORS, BILLOW--!
SUMMON FORTH THE GREAT GREEN EMPRESS, SHE WHO---
NAY, WIZARD! MY EVIL ANCESTRESS MUST NOT RISE FROM HER WATERY TOMB.
SAY THE WORD, ALBINO, AND I'LL CARVE THE STYGIAN LIKE A PIG ON A SPIT!
STAY BACK! WHOEVER YOU BE, YOU CANNOT STOP ME NOW. YOU MUST NOT!
THE DREAM I DREAMED TOLD ME I WOULD BE SUPREME IF I AWAKENED DREAD TERHALI---
---THAT SHE WOULD REVEAL MYSTERIES TO ME WHICH WOULD LAY LOW ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE WEST!
FOOL! IT WAS XIOMBARG, QUEEN OF CHAOS SWORDS, WHO BAITED YOU THUS---TO USE YOU FOR HER OWN DARK ENDS!
I KNOW OF NO XIOMBARG! IT WAS THOTH-AMON WHO SENT YOU---AYE, THOTH-AMON!
MY RIVAL---THE ONLY MYSTIC IN ALL MY HOMELAND WHOSE MAGIC EXCELS MY OWN!
YET, SERVE ME, AND I'LL PAY YOU FAR MORE THAN HE! I'LL---

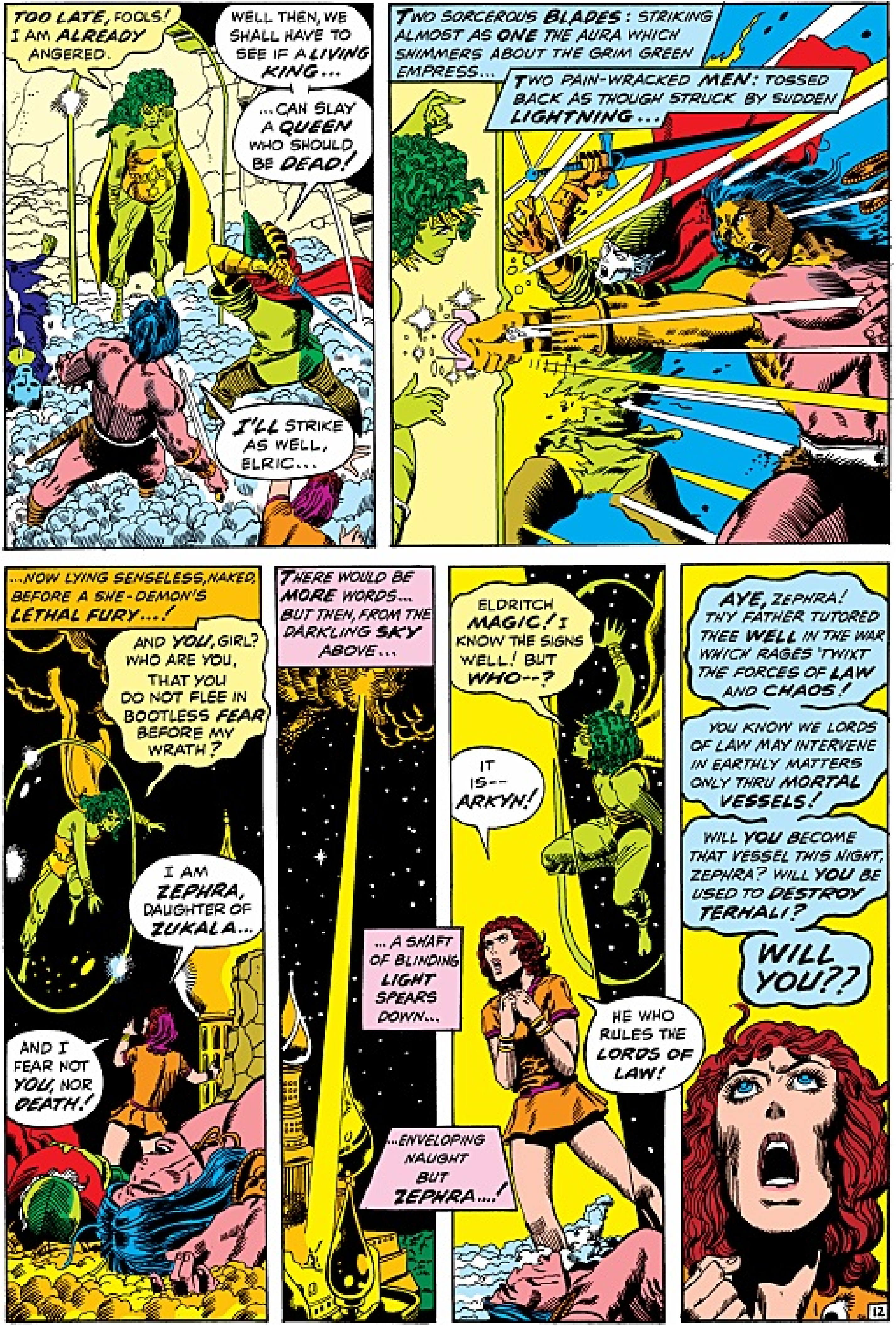

EH? WHAT SUDDEN FLASH TURNS THE VERY WALLS TO SEA-BLUE CLOUDS?
STYGIAN, IF THIS IS SOME WIZARD'S TRICK, I'LL---
I FEAR NOT, CONAN.
'TIS HE WHOM I HAVE BEEN EXPECTING, ALL ALONG.
'TIS PRINCE GAYNOR THE DAMNED---
--HE WHO COMMANDS THE CHAOS PACK OF XIOMBARG!
CROM! NOT AGAIN!
THEN, AS NIGHTMARE SHADOWS DANCE MADLY ON THE VAULTED CEILING OVERHEAD--
---CIMMERIAN AND SORCERER-KING LEAP JUST AS MADLY INTO THE PITCHED, UNEQUAL FRAY!
COME DOWN OFF YOUR HORSE, GAYNOR---AND FACE THE STING OF STORMBRINGER!
AYE, I'LL DISMOUNT, SURELY ENOUGH---
---BUT ONLY TO BUY MY PASSAGE TO OBLIVION---WITH YOUR DEATH!

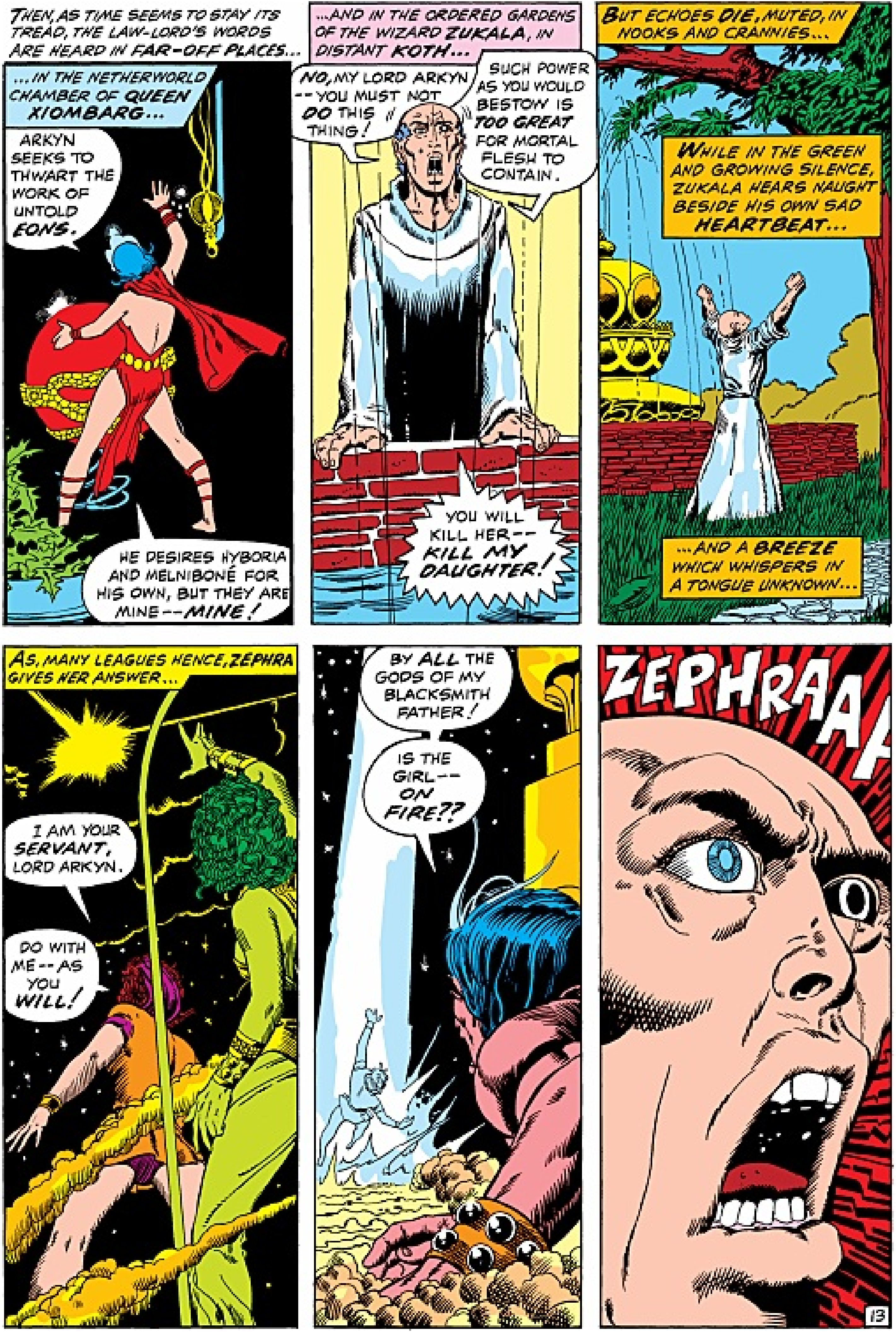

GET UP, PALE-SKIN! STAND UP AND FIGHT BACK AGAINST THESE DEMON-HORDES!
I'LL HACK MY WAY TO YOU -- AND TREAD A PATHWAY OF SKULLS, IF I MUST.
NO, CONAN -- IT IS NOT ELRIC WHO MUST CONCERN YOU NOW.
KULAN-GATH RETURNS TO HIS RUNE-CASTING! IF HE SUCCEEDS--
HE'LL NOT SUCCEED! I SWEAR IT!
I'LL-- WHAT? DO YOU THINK YOU CAN KEEP US BOTH FROM THE STYGIAN, PRINCE GAYNOR?
I MUST! SUCH IS THE WILL OF QUEEN XIOMBARG!
THEN TELL YOUR HELLISH QUEEN...
--THAT CONAN, TOO, HAS A WILL OF IRON!
CROM! I DIDN'T THINK EVEN THIS BEWITCHED SWORD WOULD FELL HIM.
BUT NOW, KULAN-GATH...
--HAS ALREADY COMPLETED HIS OBSCENE RITUAL, I FEAR.
FEAR? AYE--FEAR INDEED, YOU HAPLESS DOGS!
THE RITUAL IS ENDED! THE SPELL IS DULY CAST!
CAN YOU NOT FEEL THE VERY EARTH BEGIN TO TREMBLE 'NEATH YOUR FEET...?


DO YOU NOT SEE THE GLOWING *NIMBUS* WHICH WRAPS LONG-SUNKEN YAGALA IN A BEDAZZLING *SHROUD*---
---AND MAKES THE *SIGHING LAKE* ITSELF TO VANISH LIKE WIND-DRIVEN *MIST*---
---UNTIL, AMID A BURST OF EMERALD *BRILLIANCE* AND A CRUMBLING OF TOMB-COLD *WALLS*---
--SHE LIVES!
TERHALI, GREEN EMPRESS OF MELNIBONÉ-- LIVES!

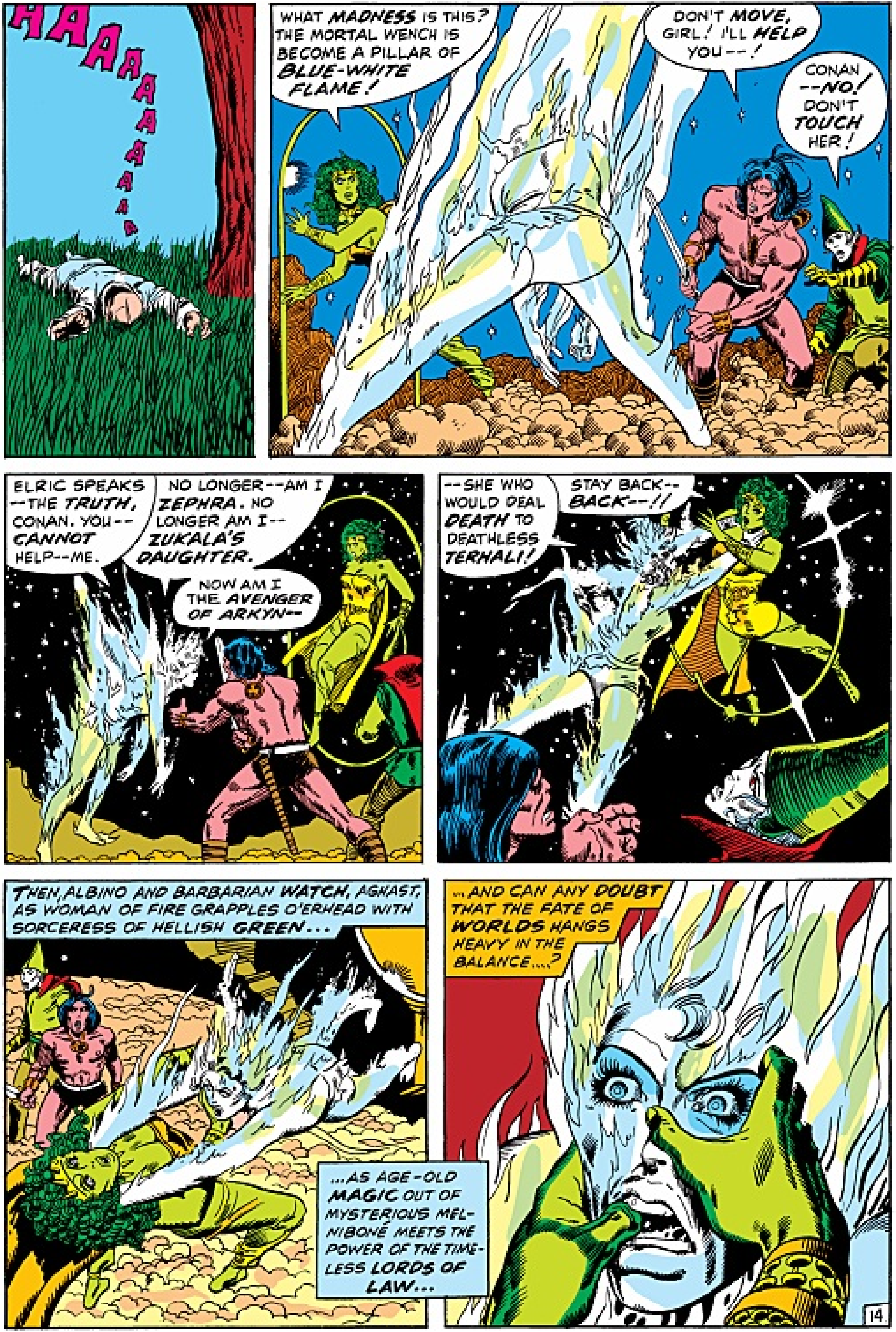

ELRIC! THE WITCH FLOATS ON AIR--AND SHE'S GREEN ENOUGH TO MAKE MY OWN FLESH CRAWL.
SPELLS ARE CAST--AND SPELLS ARE BROKEN, MAN.
BUT YOU SAID SPELLS HAD IMPRISONED HER FOR ALL TIME!
TERHALI LIVES! XIOMBARG BE PRAISED!
DO YOU HEAR ME, O XIOMBARG, QUEEN OF THE CHAOS SWORDS? TERHALI IS RISEN!
WITH HER POWER ADDED TO YOUR OWN, BOTH THIS WORLD AND THE BRIGHT EMPIRE OF MELNIBONÉ ARE YOURS!
BLASPHEMOUS CUR!
MELNIBONÉ SERVES ONLY ARIOCH, DUKE OF CHAOS...
...AS DOES ELRIC, MASTER OF STORMBRINGER!
AHHH...KILL ME...YES, KILL ME...!
NO! NOT EVEN THAT DARK BLADE CAN KILL ME, IT SEEMS.
MY RUNESWORD CHUCKLES, LIKE A THING ALIVE!
I GO...I... GGoooo...
YET, THOUGH GAYNOR TURNS TO DUST BEFORE MY EYES...
...AYE, AND THOUGH HIS CHAOS PACK DO THE SAME...
STILL, I SENSE GAYNOR HAS BUT VANISHED... EXILED TO SOME OTHER WORLD.
'TIS NONE OF XIOMBARG'S DOING, I TROW.
SURELY, THIS IS ARIOCH'S DOING...
ARIOCH--WHO STILL HATES XIOMBARG AS MUCH AS EVER HE DID THE LAW-LORD ARKYN!

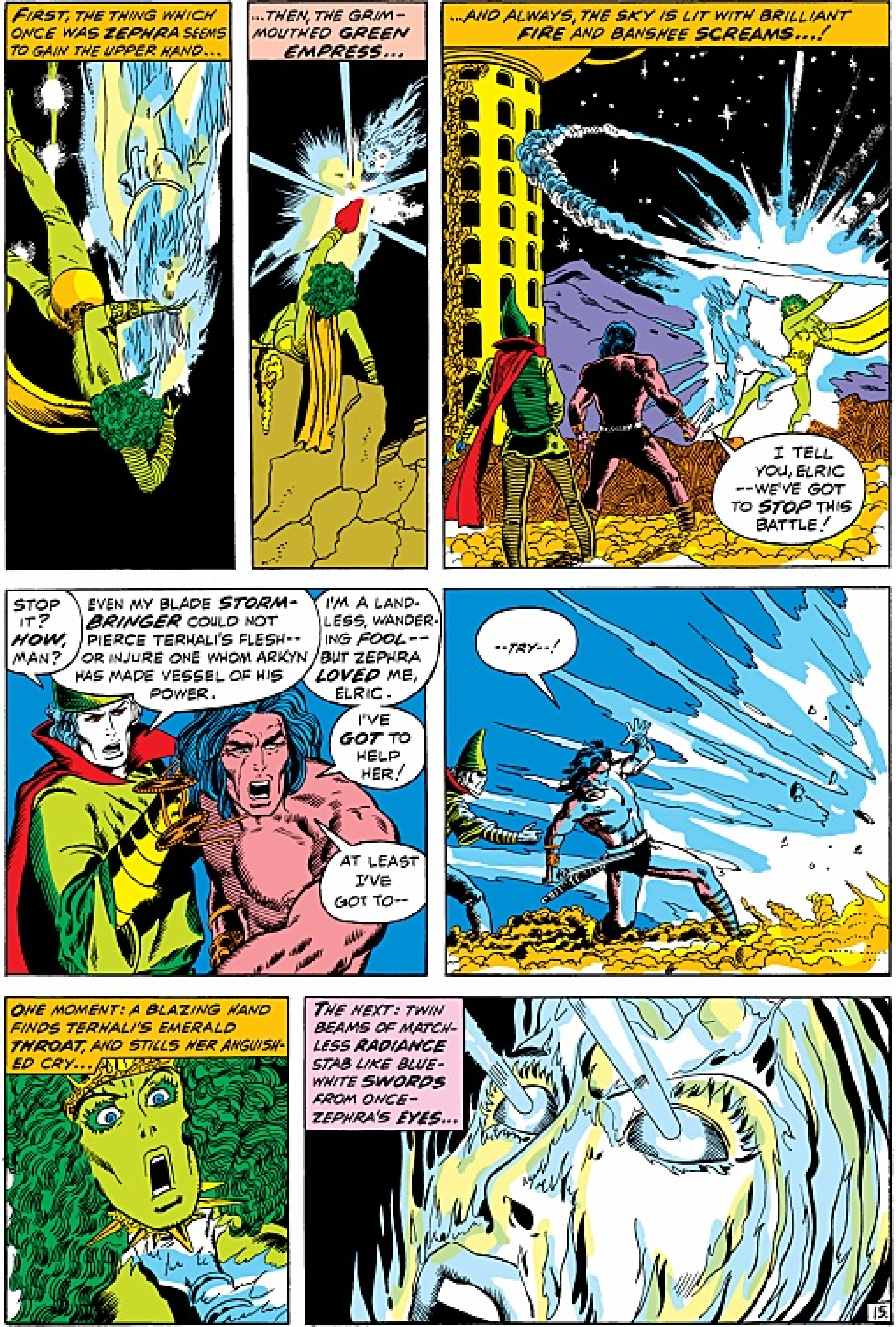

"ARIOCH"? "ARKYN"? MY HEAD ACHES WITH NAMES I HAVE NO FACES FOR.
I SHOULD HAVE RIDDEN ON TOWARD ARGOS, AND NOT BEEN SWAYED BY LIES OF EASY LOOTING!
AND NOW WHAT'S THAT DEVIL KULAN-GATH MOANING ABOUT...?
DREAD TERHALI... YOU WHO ARE SPAWN OF TWO TIMES, TWO WORLDS...
IT IS I WHO CAST THE RUNES WHICH WOKE YOU...AND I ALONE YOU MUST OBEY!
OBEY? OBEY?
TERHALI WAS NOT BORN TO OBEY...
...BUT TO RULE!
AND MORE --TO DESTROY!
YOU THREE I'LL LET LIVE... AS THE FIRST OF MY SLAVES.
SOON, YAGALA WILL TEEM WITH SLAVES ONCE MORE. THEN, I'LL CONQUER THIS DIM WORLD...
...AND EVEN MELNIBONÉ WILL BE MINE AGAIN.
I RULE IN MELNIBONÉ...
...OR AT LEAST, I DID WHEN I LEFT THE BRIGHT EMPIRE, ANCESTRESS.
I JOURNEYED HERE 'CROSS SPACE AND TIME, TO ASK A FAVOR...
FAVOR? TERHALI GRANTS NO FAVORS TO SLAVES...LEST IT BE TO LET THEM SERVE HER!
FOR CROM'S SAKE, MAN--DON'T ANGER HER!

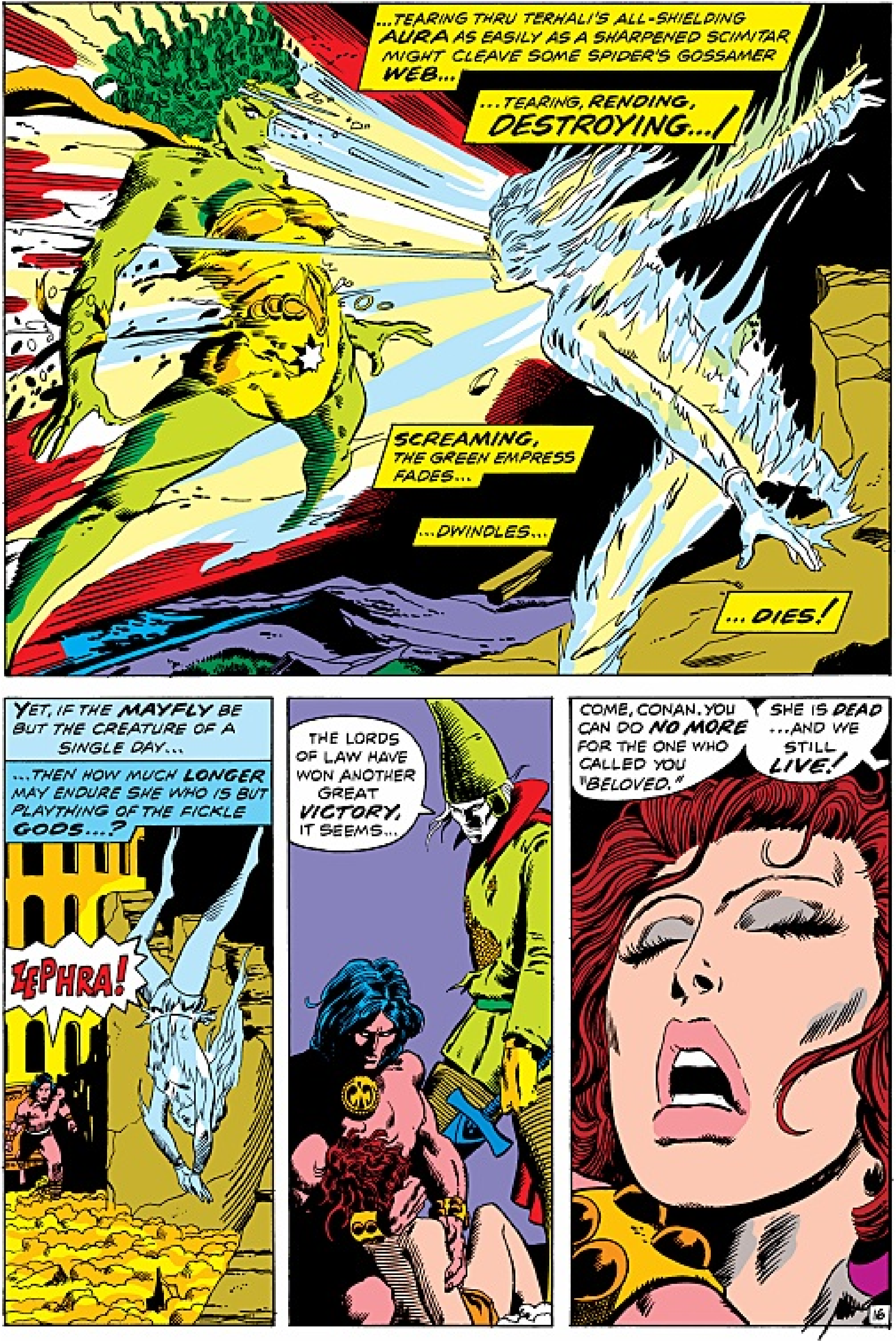

TOO LATE, FOOLS! I AM ALREADY ANGERED.
WELL THEN, WE SHALL HAVE TO SEE IF A LIVING KING...
...CAN SLAY A QUEEN WHO SHOULD BE DEAD!
I'LL STRIKE AS WELL, ELRIC...
TWO SORCEROUS BLADES: STRIKING ALMOST AS ONE THE AURA WHICH SHIMMERS ABOUT THE GRIM GREEN EMPRESS...
TWO PAIN-WRACKED MEN: TOSSED BACK AS THOUGH STRUCK BY SUDDEN LIGHTNING...
...NOW LYING SENSELESS, NAKED, BEFORE A SHE-DEMON'S LETHAL FURY...!
AND YOU, GIRL? WHO ARE YOU, THAT YOU DO NOT FLEE IN BOOTLESS FEAR BEFORE MY WRATH?
I AM ZEPHRA, DAUGHTER OF ZUKALA...
AND I FEAR NOT YOU, NOR DEATH!
THERE WOULD BE MORE WORDS... BUT THEN, FROM THE DARKLING SKY ABOVE...
...A SHAFT OF BLINDING LIGHT SPEARS DOWN...
...ENVELOPING NAUGHT BUT ZEPHRA...!
ELDRITCH MAGIC! I KNOW THE SIGNS WELL! BUT WHO--?
IT IS-- ARKYN!
HE WHO RULES THE LORDS OF LAW!
AYE, ZEPHRA! THY FATHER TUTORED THEE WELL IN THE WAR WHICH RAGES 'TWIXT THE FORCES OF LAW AND CHAOS!
YOU KNOW WE LORDS OF LAW MAY INTERVENE IN EARTHLY MATTERS ONLY THRU MORTAL VESSELS!
WILL YOU BECOME THAT VESSEL THIS NIGHT, ZEPHRA? WILL YOU BE USED TO DESTROY TERHALI?
WILL YOU??

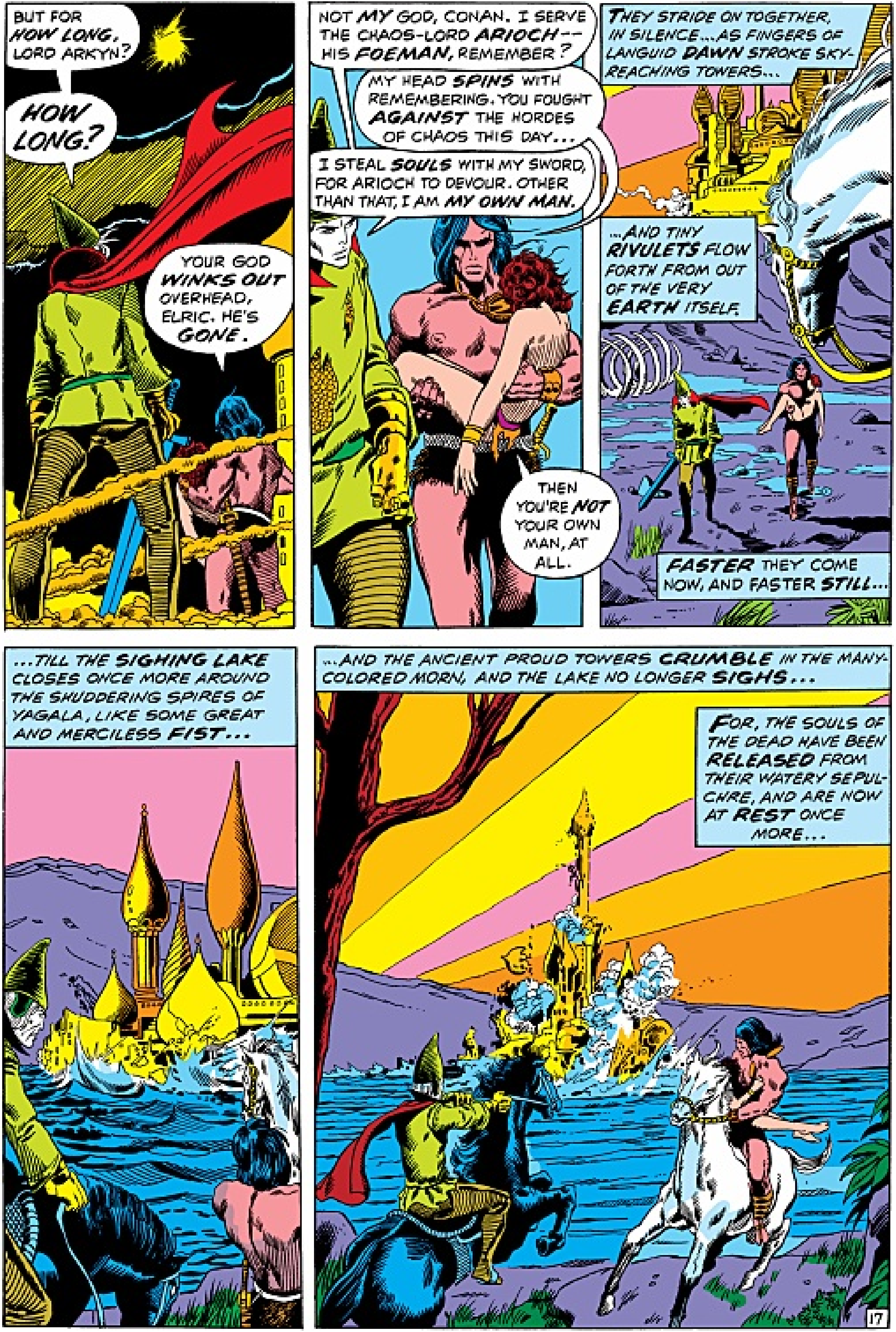


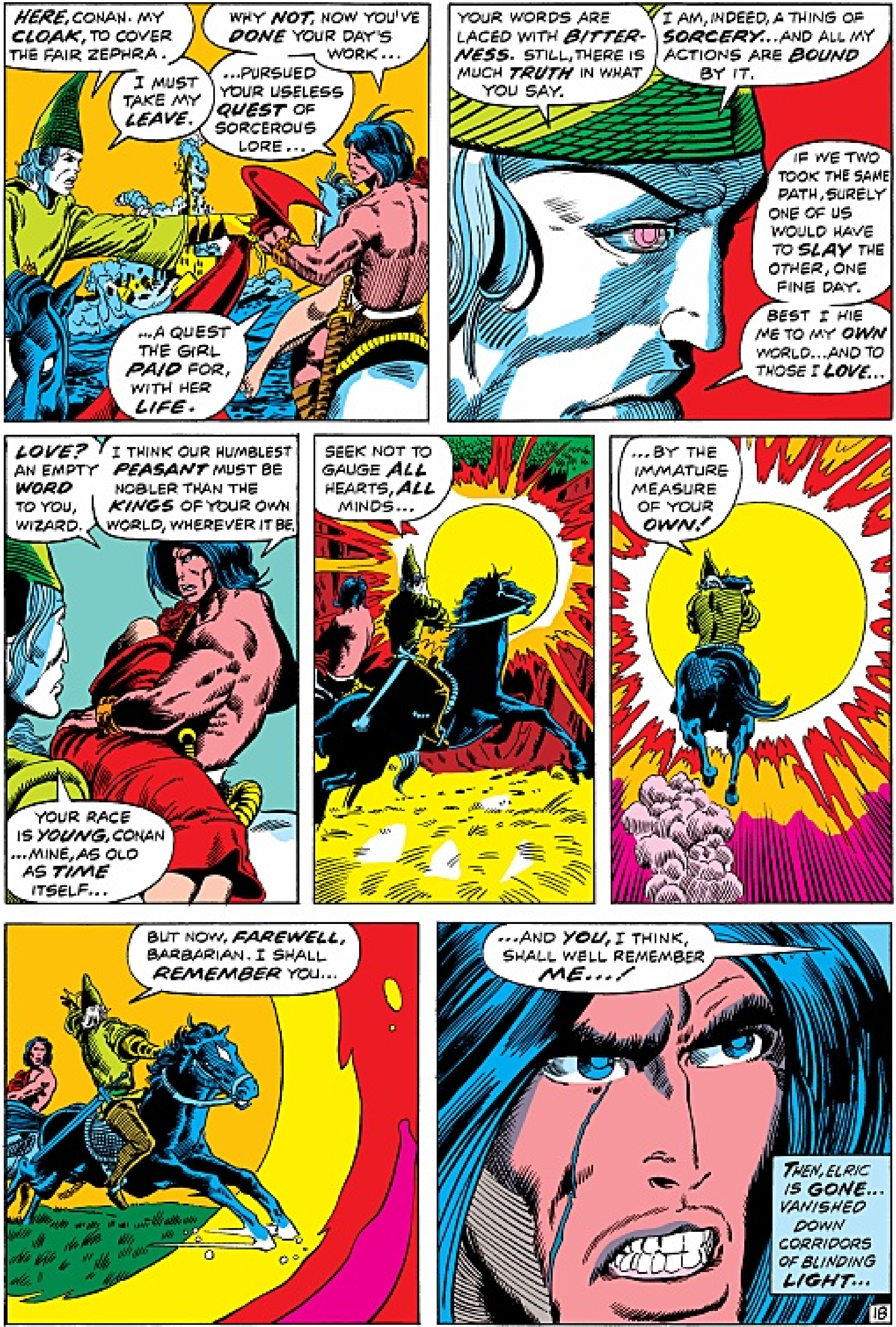
THEN, AS TIME SEEMS TO STAY ITS TREAD, THE LAW-LORD'S WORDS ARE HEARD IN FAR-OFF PLACES...
...IN THE NETHERWORLD CHAMBER OF QUEEN XIOMBARG...
ARKYN SEEKS TO THWART THE WORK OF UNTOLD EONS.
HE DESIRES HYBORIA AND MELNIBONÉ FOR HIS OWN, BUT THEY ARE MINE--MINE!
...AND IN THE ORDERED GARDENS OF THE WIZARD ZUKALA, IN DISTANT KOTH...
NO, MY LORD ARKYN --YOU MUST NOT DO THIS THING!
SUCH POWER AS YOU WOULD BESTOW IS TOO GREAT FOR MORTAL FLESH TO CONTAIN.
YOU WILL KILL HER-- KILL MY DAUGHTER!
BUT ECHOES DIE, MUTED, IN NOOKS AND CRANNIES...
WHILE IN THE GREEN AND GROWING SILENCE, ZUKALA HEARS NAUGHT BESIDE HIS OWN SAD HEARTBEAT...
...AND A BREEZE WHICH WHISPERS IN A TONGUE UNKNOWN...
AS, MANY LEAGUES HENCE, ZEPHRA GIVES HER ANSWER...
I AM YOUR SERVANT, LORD ARKYN.
DO WITH ME--AS YOU WILL!
BY ALL THE GODS OF MY BLACKSMITH FATHER!
IS THE GIRL-- ON FIRE??
ZEPHRAAA

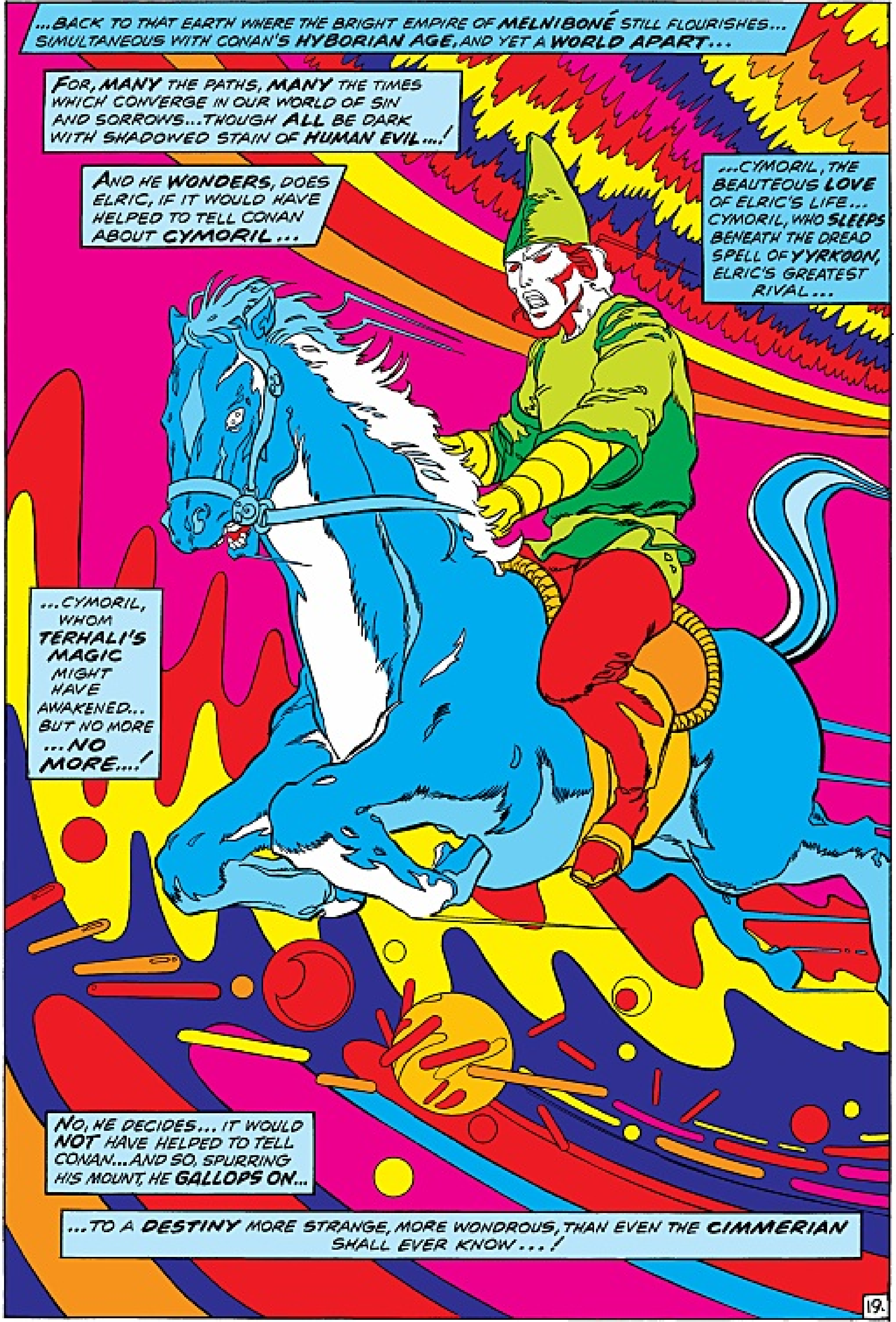

HAAAAAAAAA
WHAT MADNESS IS THIS? THE MORTAL WENCH IS BECOME A PILLAR OF BLUE-WHITE FLAME!
DON'T MOVE, GIRL! I'LL HELP YOU--!
CONAN --NO! DON'T TOUCH HER!
ELRIC SPEAKS --THE TRUTH, CONAN. YOU-- CANNOT HELP--ME.
NO LONGER--AM I ZEPHRA. NO LONGER AM I-- ZUKALA'S DAUGHTER.
NOW AM I THE AVENGER OF ARKYN--
--SHE WHO WOULD DEAL DEATH TO DEATHLESS TERHALI!
STAY BACK-- BACK--!!
THEN, ALBINO AND BARBARIAN WATCH, AGHAST, AS WOMAN OF FIRE GRAPPLES O'ERHEAD WITH SORCERESS OF HELLISH GREEN...
...AS AGE-OLD MAGIC OUT OF MYSTERIOUS MELNIBONÉ MEETS THE POWER OF THE TIMELESS LORDS OF LAW...
...AND CAN ANY DOUBT THAT THE FATE OF WORLDS HANGS HEAVY IN THE BALANCE....?

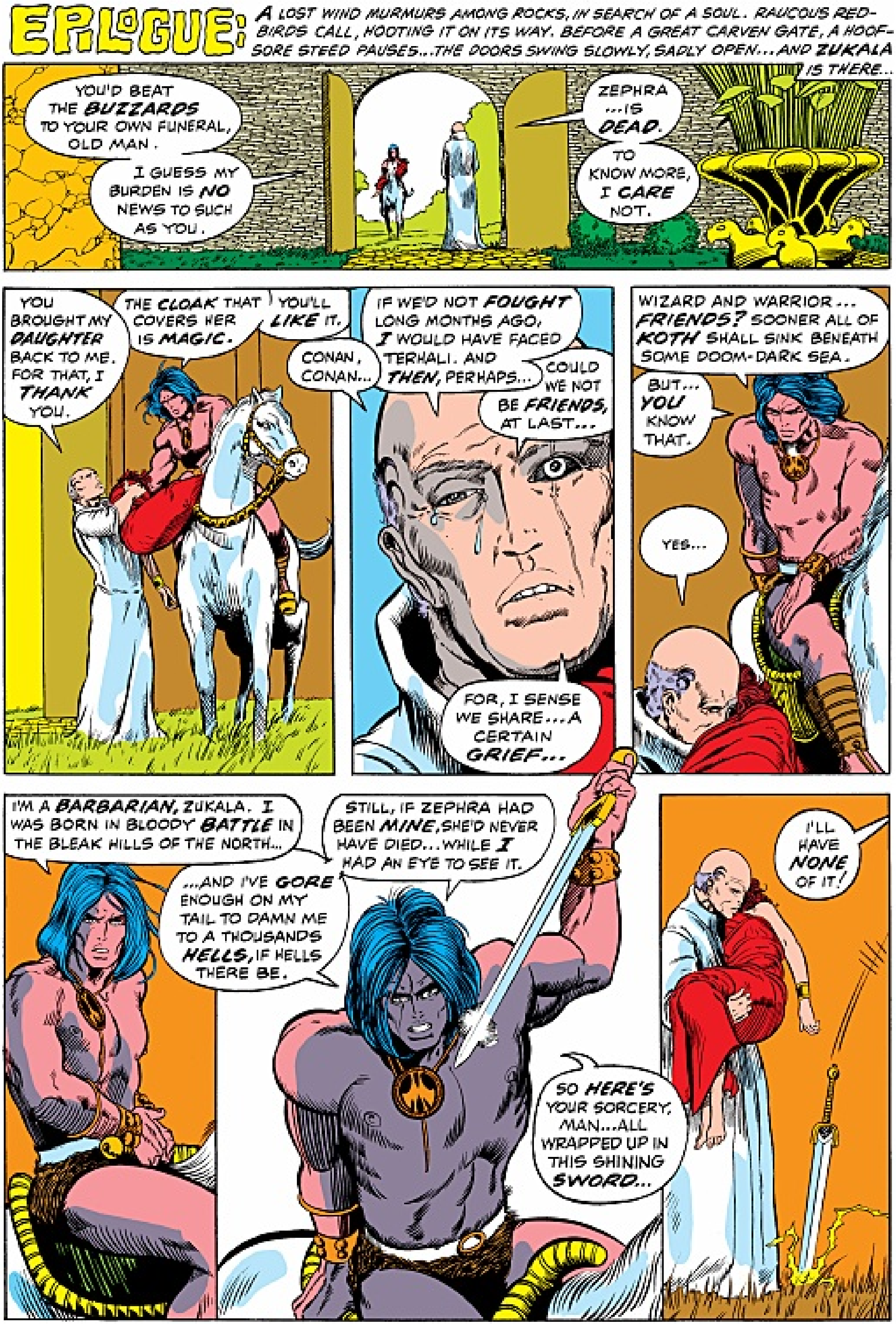

FIRST, THE THING WHICH ONCE WAS **ZEPHRA** SEEMS TO GAIN THE UPPER HAND...
...THEN, THE GRIM-MOUTHED **GREEN EMPRESS**...
...AND ALWAYS, THE SKY IS LIT WITH BRILLIANT **FIRE** AND BANSHEE **SCREAMS**...!
I TELL YOU, ELRIC --WE'VE GOT TO **STOP** THIS BATTLE!
STOP IT? **HOW,** MAN?
EVEN MY BLADE **STORMBRINGER** COULD NOT PIERCE TERHALI'S FLESH--OR INJURE ONE WHOM ARKYN HAS MADE VESSEL OF HIS POWER.
I'M A LANDLESS, WANDERING **FOOL**--BUT ZEPHRA **LOVED** ME, ELRIC.
I'VE **GOT** TO HELP HER!
AT LEAST I'VE GOT TO--
--TRY--!
ONE MOMENT: A BLAZING HAND FINDS TERHALI'S EMERALD **THROAT,** AND STILLS HER ANGUISHED CRY...
THE NEXT: TWIN BEAMS OF MATCHLESS **RADIANCE** STAB LIKE BLUE-WHITE **SWORDS** FROM ONCE-ZEPHRA'S **EYES**...

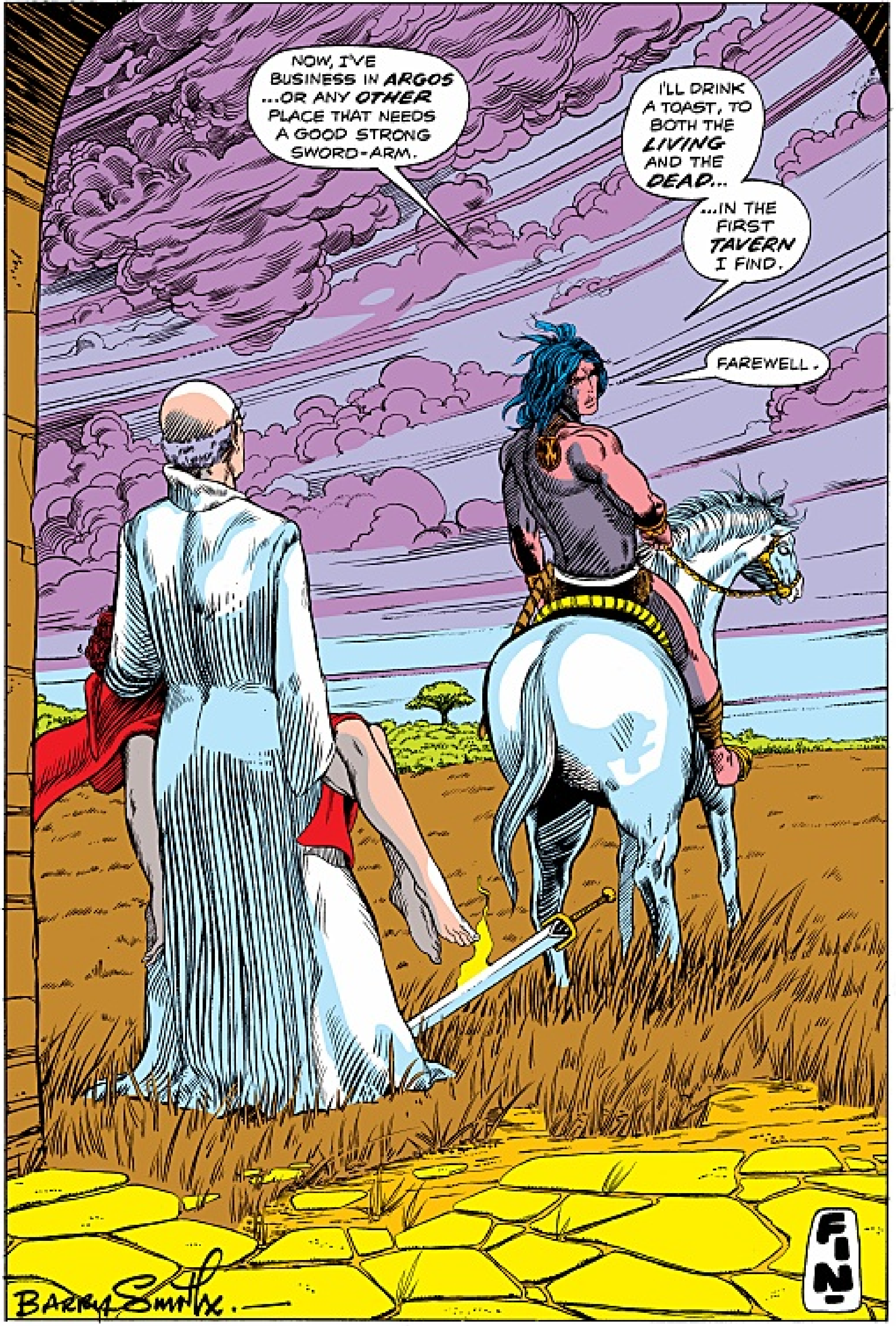

...TEARING THRU TERHALI'S ALL-SHIELDING AURA AS EASILY AS A SHARPENED SCIMITAR MIGHT CLEAVE SOME SPIDER'S GOSSAMER WEB...
...TEARING, RENDING, DESTROYING...!
SCREAMING, THE GREEN EMPRESS FADES...
...DWINDLES...
...DIES!
YET, IF THE MAYFLY BE BUT THE CREATURE OF A SINGLE DAY...
...THEN HOW MUCH LONGER MAY ENDURE SHE WHO IS BUT PLAYTHING OF THE FICKLE GODS...?
ZEPHRA!
THE LORDS OF LAW HAVE WON ANOTHER GREAT VICTORY, IT SEEMS...
COME, CONAN. YOU CAN DO NO MORE FOR THE ONE WHO CALLED YOU "BELOVED."
SHE IS DEAD ...AND WE STILL LIVE!

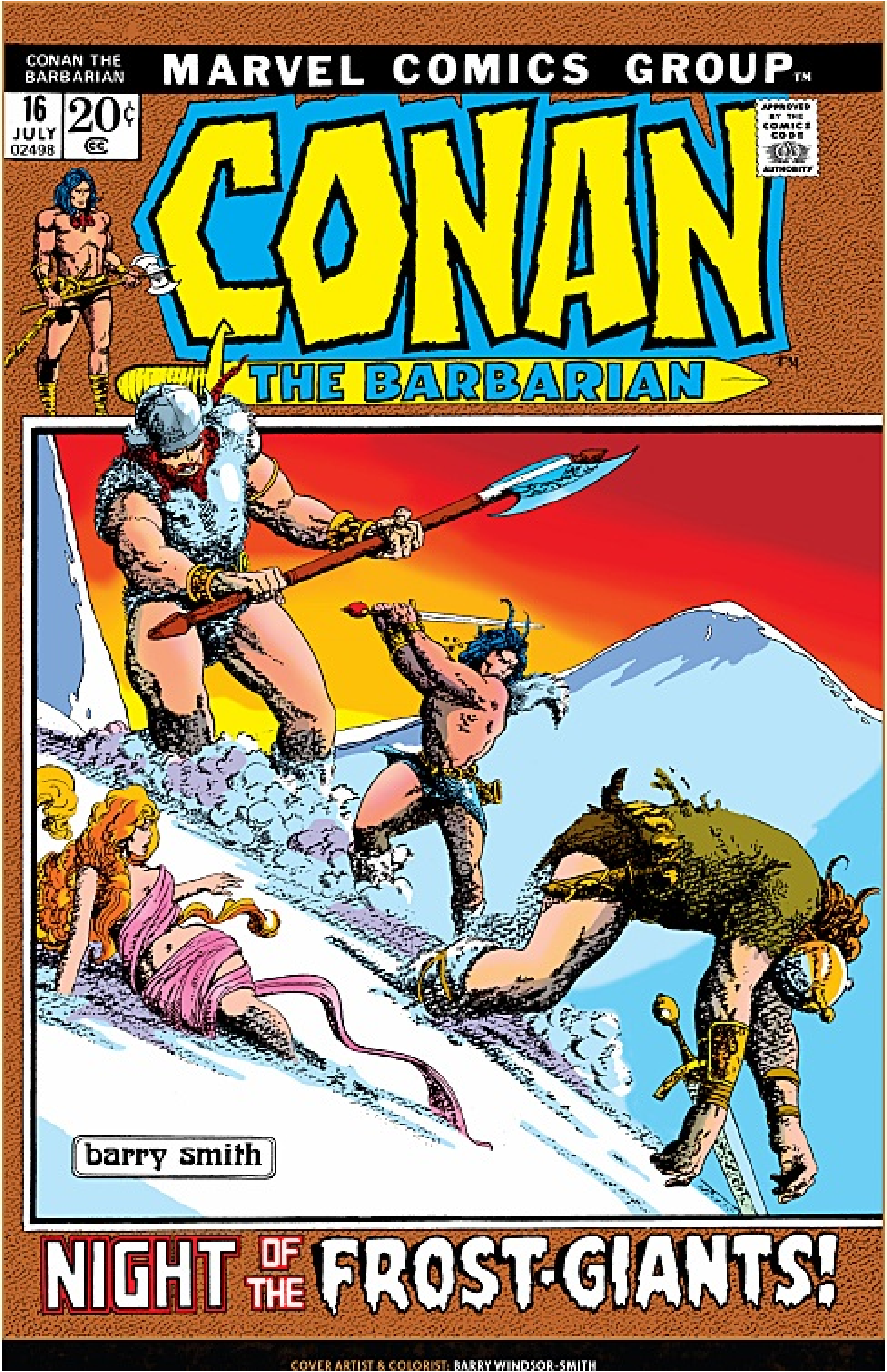

BUT FOR HOW LONG, LORD ARKYN?
HOW LONG?
YOUR GOD WINKS OUT OVERHEAD, ELRIC. HE'S GONE.
NOT MY GOD, CONAN. I SERVE THE CHAOS-LORD ARIOCH-- HIS FOEMAN, REMEMBER?
MY HEAD SPINS WITH REMEMBERING. YOU FOUGHT AGAINST THE HORDES OF CHAOS THIS DAY...
I STEAL SOULS WITH MY SWORD, FOR ARIOCH TO DEVOUR. OTHER THAN THAT, I AM MY OWN MAN.
THEN YOU'RE NOT YOUR OWN MAN, AT ALL.
THEY STRIDE ON TOGETHER, IN SILENCE...AS FINGERS OF LANGUID DAWN STROKE SKY-REACHING TOWERS...
...AND TINY RIVULETS FLOW FORTH FROM OUT OF THE VERY EARTH ITSELF.
FASTER THEY COME NOW, AND FASTER STILL...
...TILL THE SIGHING LAKE CLOSES ONCE MORE AROUND THE SHUDDERING SPIRES OF YAGALA, LIKE SOME GREAT AND MERCILESS FIST...
...AND THE ANCIENT PROUD TOWERS CRUMBLE IN THE MANY-COLORED MORN, AND THE LAKE NO LONGER SIGHS...
FOR, THE SOULS OF THE DEAD HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM THEIR WATERY SEPULCHRE, AND ARE NOW AT REST ONCE MORE...


HERE, CONAN. MY CLOAK, TO COVER THE FAIR ZEPHRA.
I MUST TAKE MY LEAVE.
WHY NOT, NOW YOU'VE DONE YOUR DAY'S WORK...
...PURSUED YOUR USELESS QUEST OF SORCEROUS LORE...
...A QUEST THE GIRL PAID FOR, WITH HER LIFE.
YOUR WORDS ARE LACED WITH BITTERNESS. STILL, THERE IS MUCH TRUTH IN WHAT YOU SAY.
I AM, INDEED, A THING OF SORCERY... AND ALL MY ACTIONS ARE BOUND BY IT.
IF WE TWO TOOK THE SAME PATH, SURELY ONE OF US WOULD HAVE TO SLAY THE OTHER, ONE FINE DAY.
BEST I HIE ME TO MY OWN WORLD... AND TO THOSE I LOVE...
LOVE? AN EMPTY WORD TO YOU, WIZARD.
I THINK OUR HUMBLEST PEASANT MUST BE NOBLER THAN THE KINGS OF YOUR OWN WORLD, WHEREVER IT BE.
YOUR RACE IS YOUNG, CONAN ...MINE, AS OLD AS TIME ITSELF...
SEEK NOT TO GAUGE ALL HEARTS, ALL MINDS...
...BY THE IMMATURE MEASURE OF YOUR OWN!
BUT NOW, FAREWELL, BARBARIAN. I SHALL REMEMBER YOU...
...AND YOU, I THINK, SHALL WELL REMEMBER ME...!
THEN, ELRIC IS GONE... VANISHED DOWN CORRIDORS OF BLINDING LIGHT...


...BACK TO THAT EARTH WHERE THE BRIGHT EMPIRE OF MELNIBONÉ STILL FLOURISHES... SIMULTANEOUS WITH CONAN'S HYBORIAN AGE, AND YET A WORLD APART...
FOR, MANY THE PATHS, MANY THE TIMES WHICH CONVERGE IN OUR WORLD OF SIN AND SORROWS...THOUGH ALL BE DARK WITH SHADOWED STAIN OF HUMAN EVIL...!
AND HE WONDERS, DOES ELRIC, IF IT WOULD HAVE HELPED TO TELL CONAN ABOUT CYMORIL...
...CYMORIL, THE BEAUTEOUS LOVE OF ELRIC'S LIFE... CYMORIL, WHO SLEEPS BENEATH THE DREAD SPELL OF YYRKOON, ELRIC'S GREATEST RIVAL...
...CYMORIL, WHOM TERHALI'S MAGIC MIGHT HAVE AWAKENED... BUT NO MORE ...NO MORE...!
NO, HE DECIDES... IT WOULD NOT HAVE HELPED TO TELL CONAN...AND SO, SPURRING HIS MOUNT, HE GALLOPS ON...
...TO A DESTINY MORE STRANGE, MORE WONDROUS, THAN EVEN THE CIMMERIAN SHALL EVER KNOW...!


EPILOGUE: A LOST WIND MURMURS AMONG ROCKS, IN SEARCH OF A SOUL. RAUCOUS RED-BIRDS CALL, HOOTING IT ON ITS WAY. BEFORE A GREAT CARVEN GATE, A HOOF-SORE STEED PAUSES...THE DOORS SWING SLOWLY, SADLY OPEN... AND ZUKALA IS THERE...
YOU'D BEAT THE BUZZARDS TO YOUR OWN FUNERAL, OLD MAN.
I GUESS MY BURDEN IS NO NEWS TO SUCH AS YOU.
ZEPHRA ...IS DEAD.
TO KNOW MORE, I CARE NOT.
YOU BROUGHT MY DAUGHTER BACK TO ME. FOR THAT, I THANK YOU.
THE CLOAK THAT COVERS HER IS MAGIC.
YOU'LL LIKE IT.
CONAN, CONAN...
IF WE'D NOT FOUGHT LONG MONTHS AGO, I WOULD HAVE FACED TERHALI. AND THEN, PERHAPS...
COULD WE NOT BE FRIENDS, AT LAST...
FOR, I SENSE WE SHARE... A CERTAIN GRIEF...
WIZARD AND WARRIOR... FRIENDS? SOONER ALL OF KOTH SHALL SINK BENEATH SOME DOOM-DARK SEA.
BUT... YOU KNOW THAT.
YES...
I'M A BARBARIAN, ZUKALA. I WAS BORN IN BLOODY BATTLE IN THE BLEAK HILLS OF THE NORTH...
...AND I'VE GORE ENOUGH ON MY TAIL TO DAMN ME TO A THOUSANDS HELLS, IF HELLS THERE BE.
STILL, IF ZEPHRA HAD BEEN MINE, SHE'D NEVER HAVE DIED... WHILE I HAD AN EYE TO SEE IT.
SO HERE'S YOUR SORCERY, MAN...ALL WRAPPED UP IN THIS SHINING SWORD...
I'LL HAVE NONE OF IT!


NOW, I'VE BUSINESS IN ARGOS ...OR ANY OTHER PLACE THAT NEEDS A GOOD STRONG SWORD-ARM.
I'LL DRINK A TOAST, TO BOTH THE LIVING AND THE DEAD...
...IN THE FIRST TAVERN I FIND.
FAREWELL.
FIN-
BARRY SMITH.


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP™
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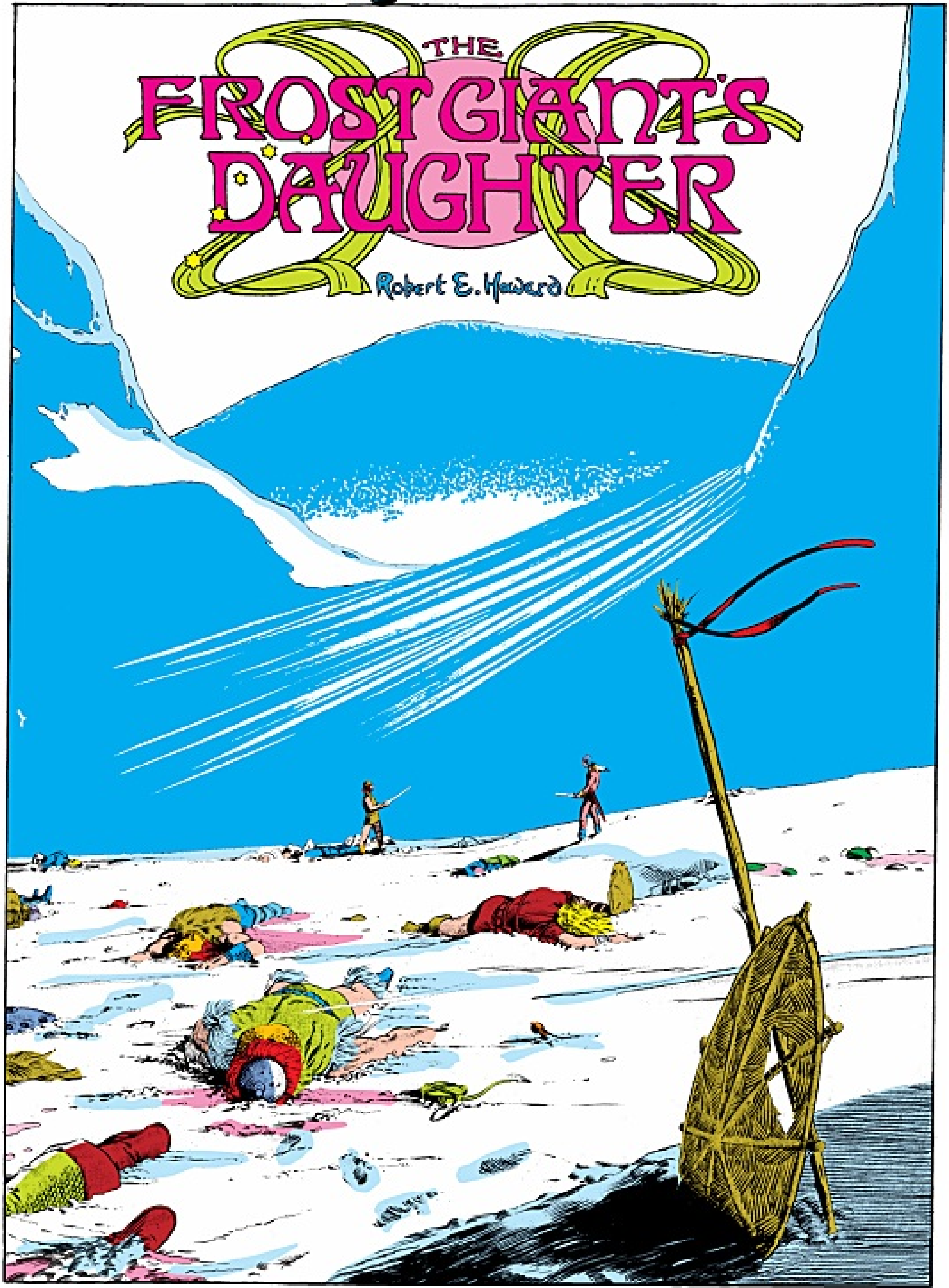
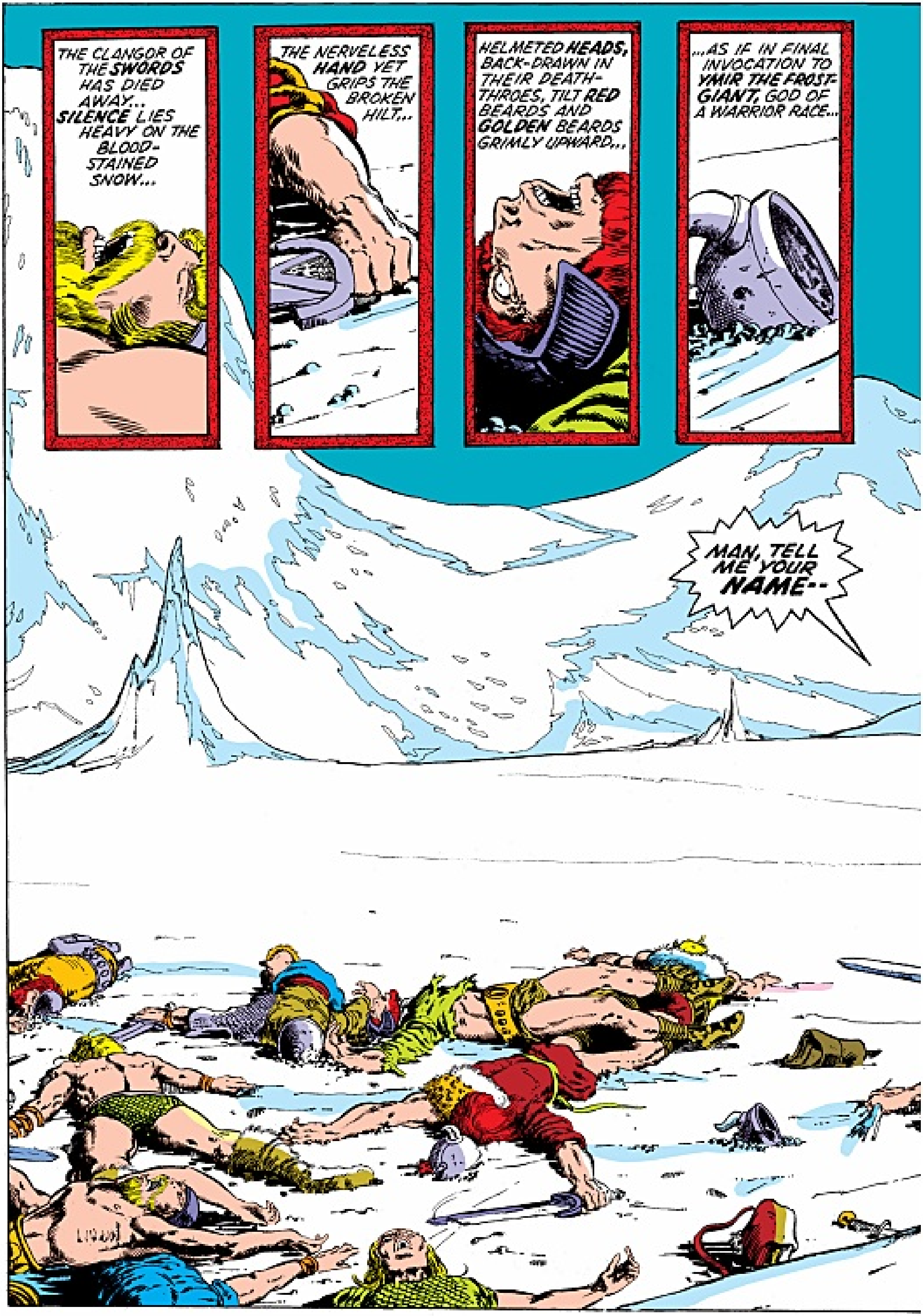
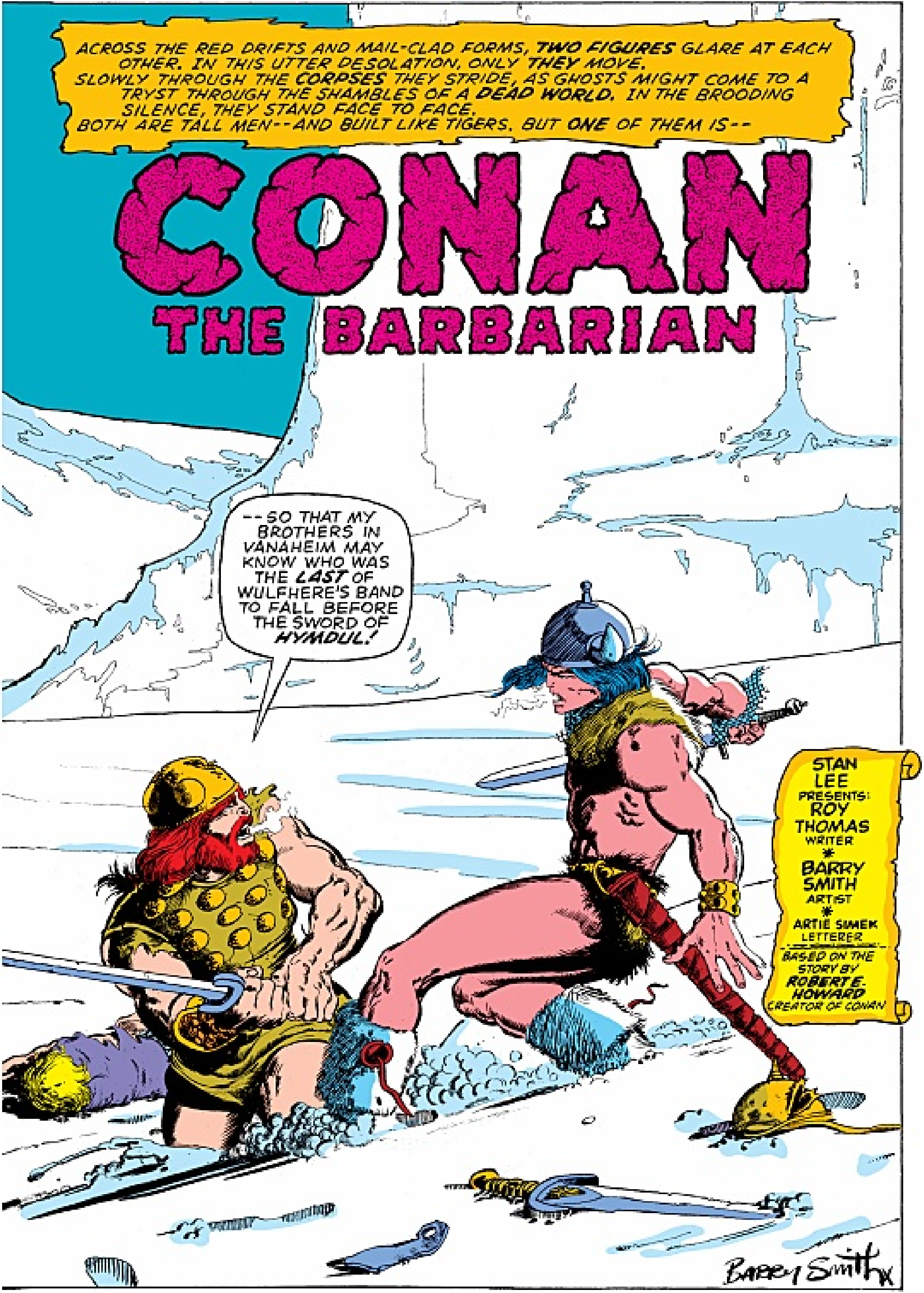
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
™
barry smith
NIGHT OF THE FROST-GIANTS!

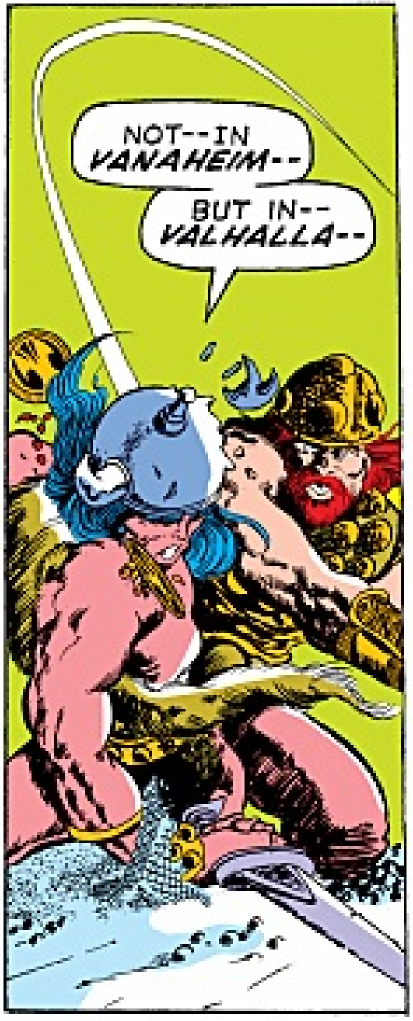
COVER ARTIST & COLORIST: BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

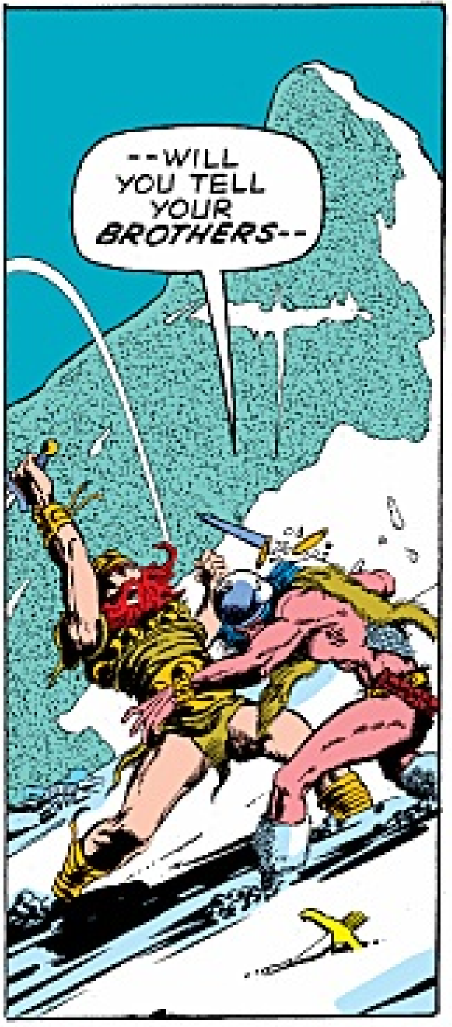
CONAN THE BARBARIAN

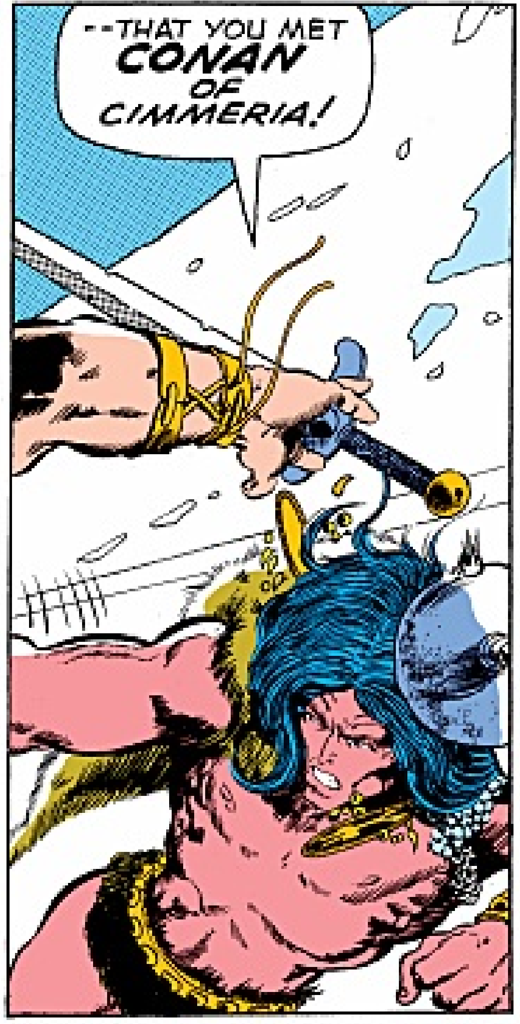

THE FROST GIANT'S DAUGHTER
Robert E. Howard


THE CLANGOR OF THE SWORDS HAS DIED AWAY... SILENCE LIES HEAVY ON THE BLOOD-STAINED SNOW...
THE NERVELESS HAND YET GRIPS THE BROKEN HILT...
HELMETED HEADS, BACK-DRAWN IN THEIR DEATH-THROES, TILT RED BEARDS AND GOLDEN BEARDS GRIMLY UPWARD...
...AS IF IN FINAL INVOCATION TO YMIR THE FROST-GIANT, GOD OF A WARRIOR RACE...
MAN, TELL ME YOUR NAME--

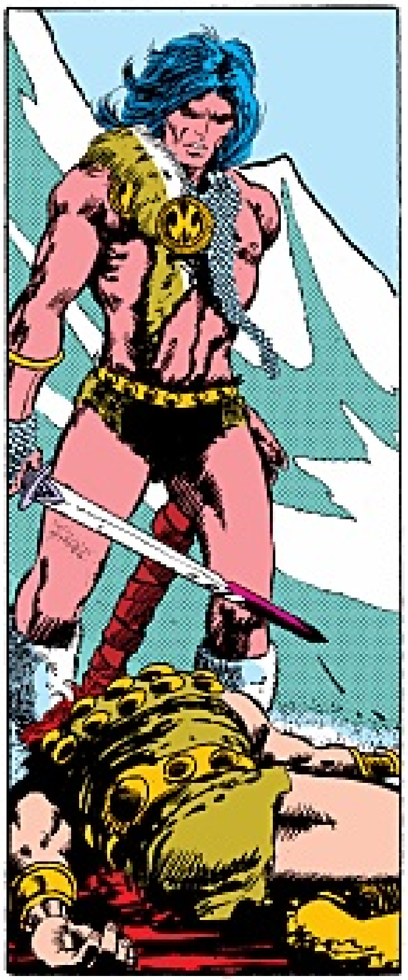

ACROSS THE RED DRIFTS AND MAIL-CLAD FORMS, TWO FIGURES GLARE AT EACH OTHER. IN THIS UTTER DESOLATION, ONLY THEY MOVE.
SLOWLY THROUGH THE CORPSES THEY STRIDE, AS GHOSTS MIGHT COME TO A TRYST THROUGH THE SHAMBLES OF A DEAD WORLD. IN THE BROODING SILENCE, THEY STAND FACE TO FACE.
BOTH ARE TALL MEN--AND BUILT LIKE TIGERS. BUT ONE OF THEM IS--
CONAN THE BARBARIAN
--SO THAT MY BROTHERS IN VANAHEIM MAY KNOW WHO WAS THE LAST OF WULFHERE'S BAND TO FALL BEFORE THE SWORD OF HYMDUL!
STAN LEE PRESENTS: ROY THOMAS WRITER * BARRY SMITH ARTIST * ARTIE SIMEK LETTERER
BASED ON THE STORY BY ROBERT E. HOWARD CREATOR OF CONAN
BARRY SMITH

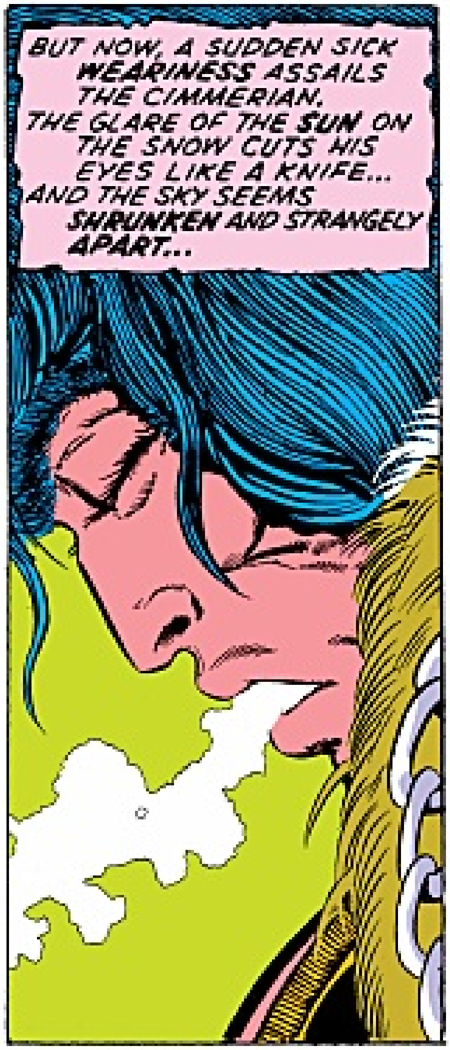

NOT--IN *VANAHEIM*--
BUT IN-- *VALHALLA*--


--WILL YOU TELL YOUR *BROTHERS*--

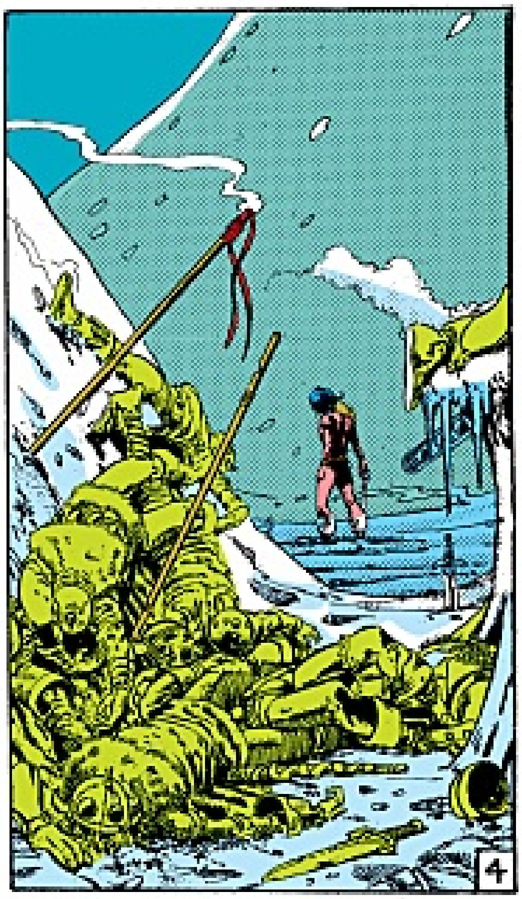

--THAT YOU MET **CONAN** OF *CIMMERIA!*

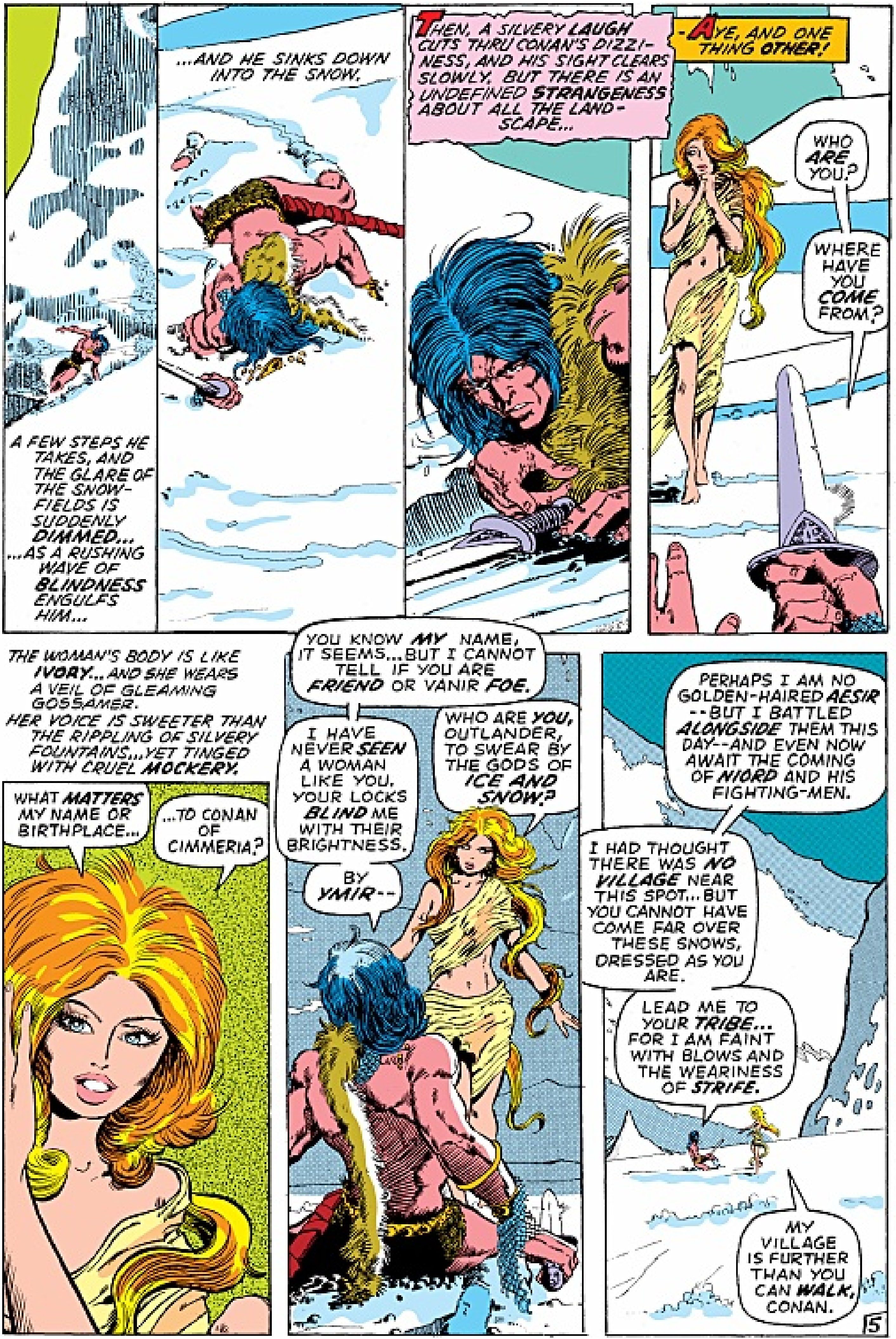
CHOKING ON HIS OWN ***GORE***, *THE VANIR-MAN DIES AT CONAN'S FEET.*

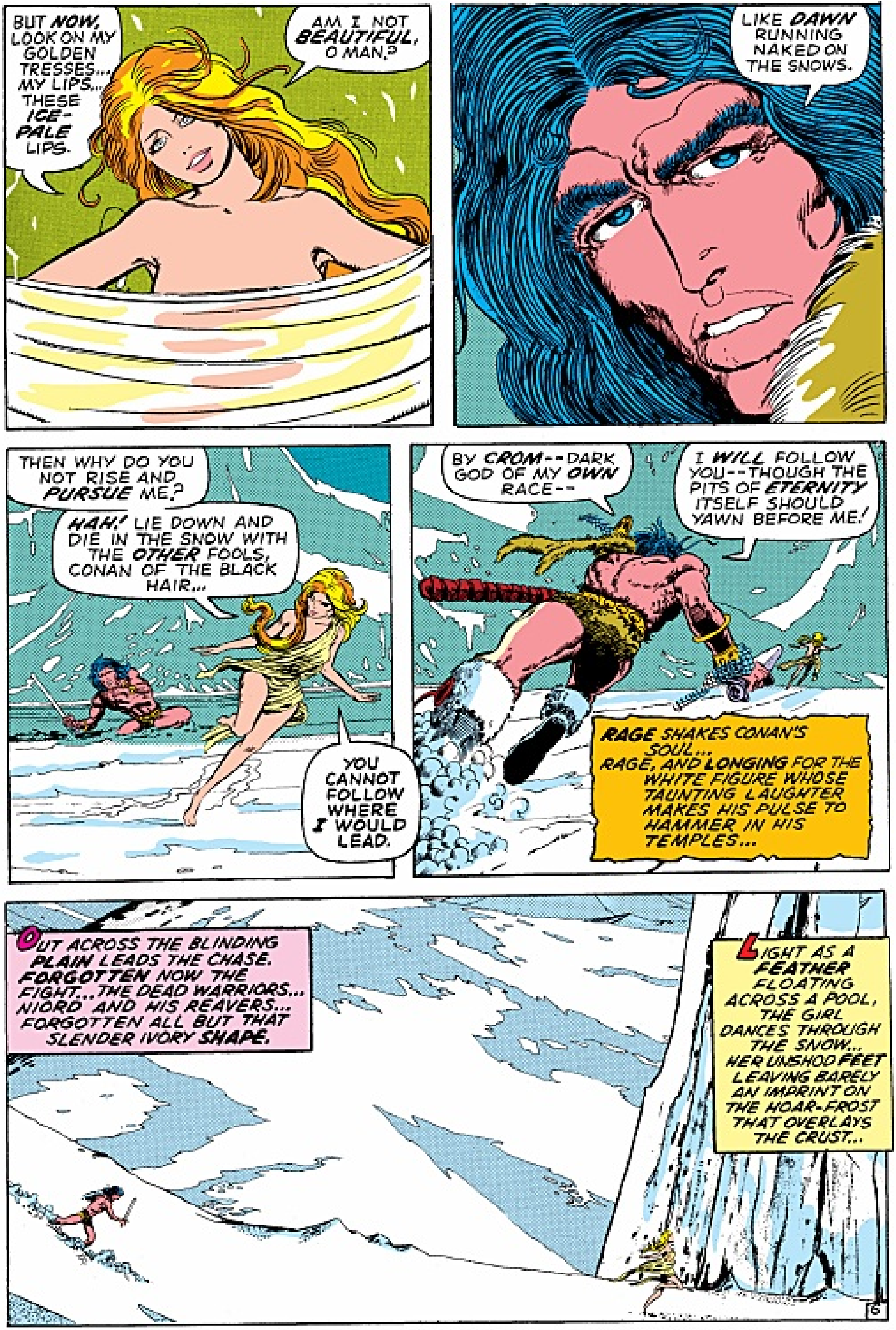


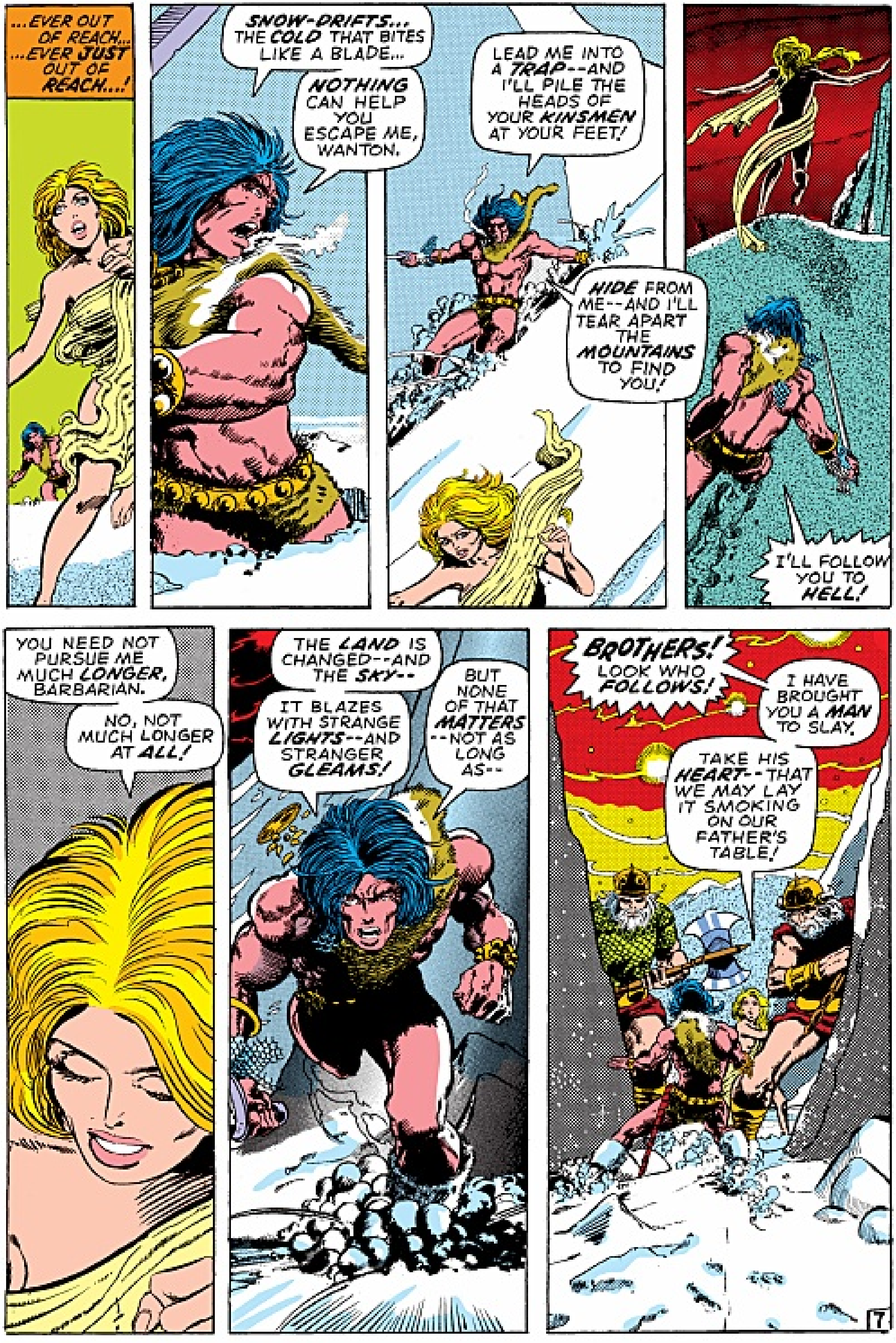

BUT NOW, A SUDDEN SICK **WEARINESS** ASSAILS THE CIMMERIAN.
THE GLARE OF THE **SUN** ON THE SNOW CUTS HIS EYES LIKE A KNIFE...
AND THE SKY SEEMS **SHRUNKEN** AND STRANGELY **APART...**

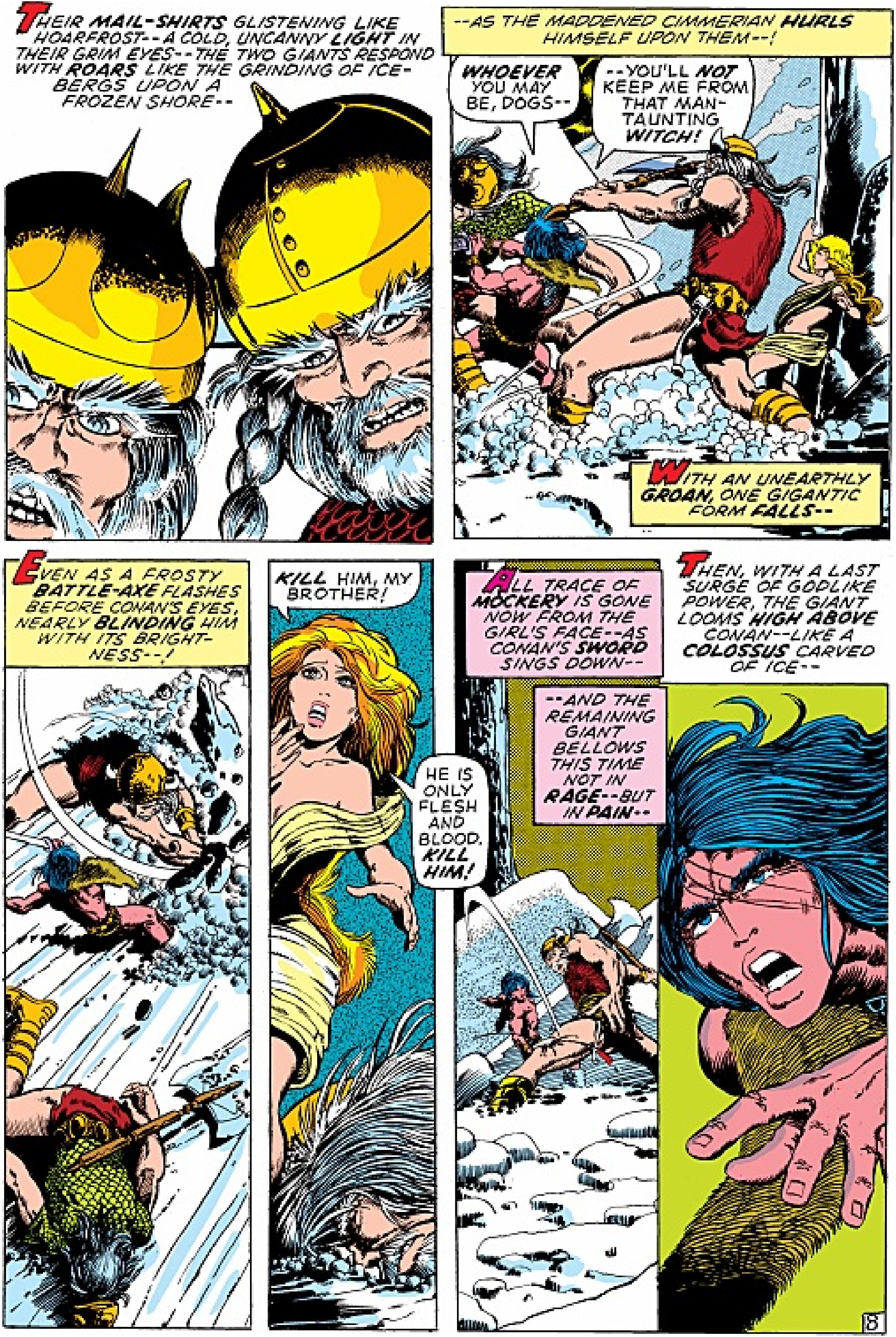
...AS HE ***TURNS AWAY*** *FROM THE TRAMPLED EXPANSE WHERE YELLOW-HAIRED WARRIORS LIE LOCKED WITH RED-HAIRED SLAYERS IN THE EMBRACE OF* ***DEATH.***

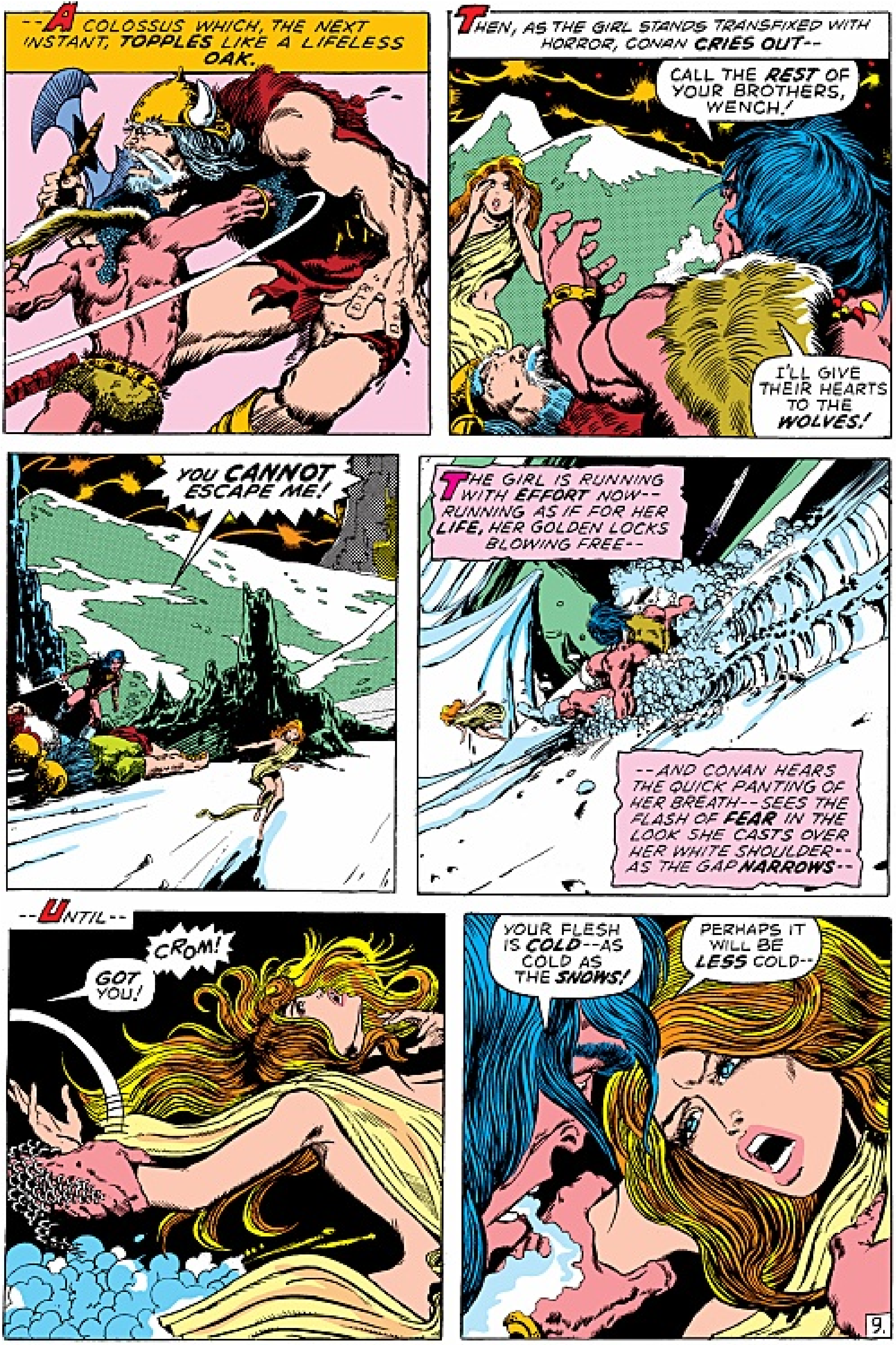


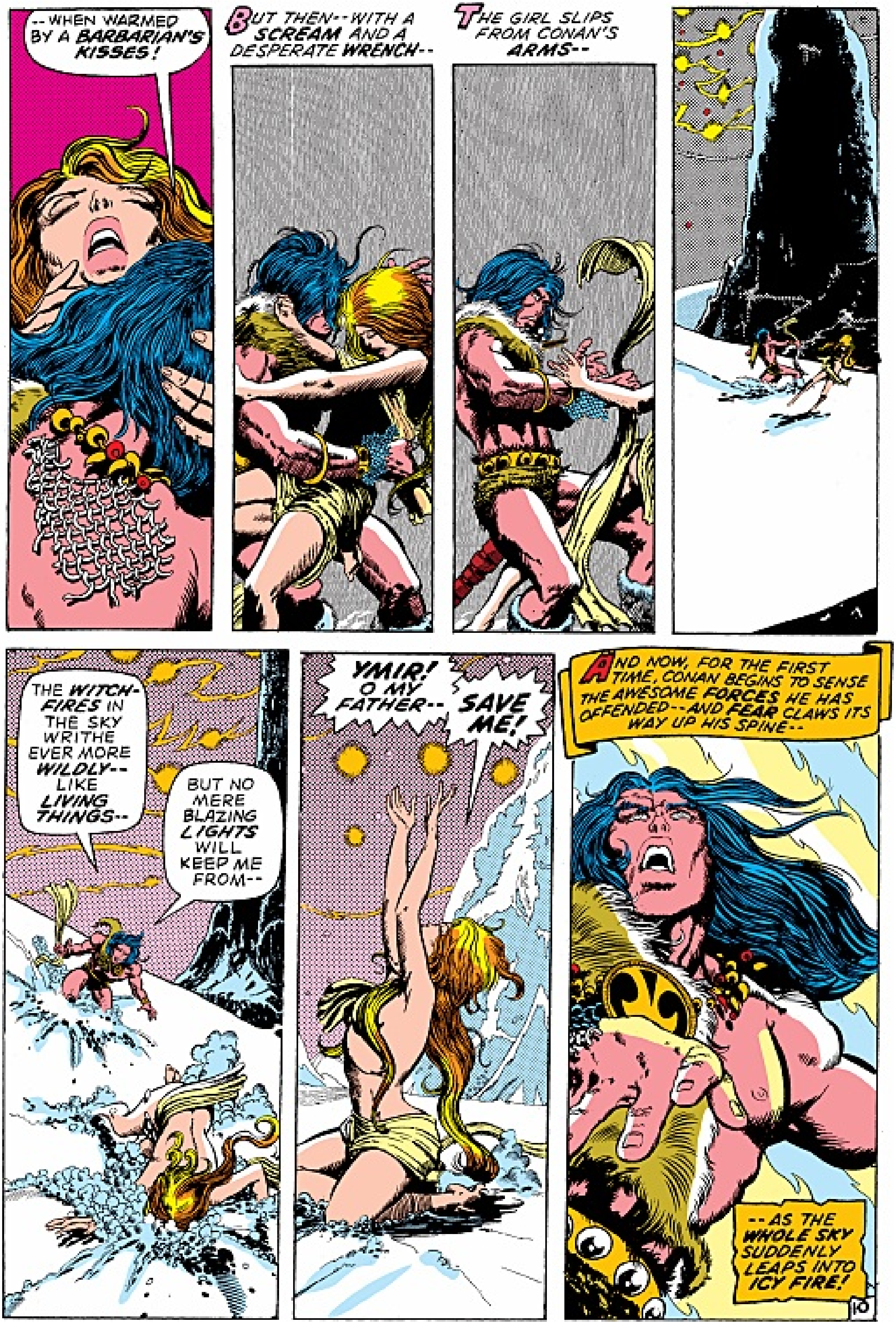

A FEW STEPS HE TAKES, AND THE GLARE OF THE SNOW-FIELDS IS SUDDENLY DIMMED... ...AS A RUSHING WAVE OF BLINDNESS ENGULFS HIM...
...AND HE SINKS DOWN INTO THE SNOW.
THEN, A SILVERY LAUGH CUTS THRU CONAN'S DIZZINESS, AND HIS SIGHT CLEARS SLOWLY. BUT THERE IS AN UNDEFINED STRANGENESS ABOUT ALL THE LANDSCAPE...
-AYE, AND ONE THING OTHER!
WHO ARE YOU?
WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM?
THE WOMAN'S BODY IS LIKE IVORY... AND SHE WEARS A VEIL OF GLEAMING GOSSAMER. HER VOICE IS SWEETER THAN THE RIPPLING OF SILVERY FOUNTAINS... YET TINGED WITH CRUEL MOCKERY.
WHAT MATTERS MY NAME OR BIRTHPLACE...
...TO CONAN OF CIMMERIA?
YOU KNOW MY NAME, IT SEEMS... BUT I CANNOT TELL IF YOU ARE FRIEND OR VANIR FOE.
I HAVE NEVER SEEN A WOMAN LIKE YOU. YOUR LOCKS BLIND ME WITH THEIR BRIGHTNESS.
BY YMIR--
WHO ARE YOU, OUTLANDER, TO SWEAR BY THE GODS OF ICE AND SNOW?
PERHAPS I AM NO GOLDEN-HAIRED AESIR --BUT I BATTLED ALONGSIDE THEM THIS DAY--AND EVEN NOW AWAIT THE COMING OF NIORD AND HIS FIGHTING-MEN.
I HAD THOUGHT THERE WAS NO VILLAGE NEAR THIS SPOT... BUT YOU CANNOT HAVE COME FAR OVER THESE SNOWS, DRESSED AS YOU ARE.
LEAD ME TO YOUR TRIBE... FOR I AM FAINT WITH BLOWS AND THE WEARINESS OF STRIFE.
MY VILLAGE IS FURTHER THAN YOU CAN WALK, CONAN.

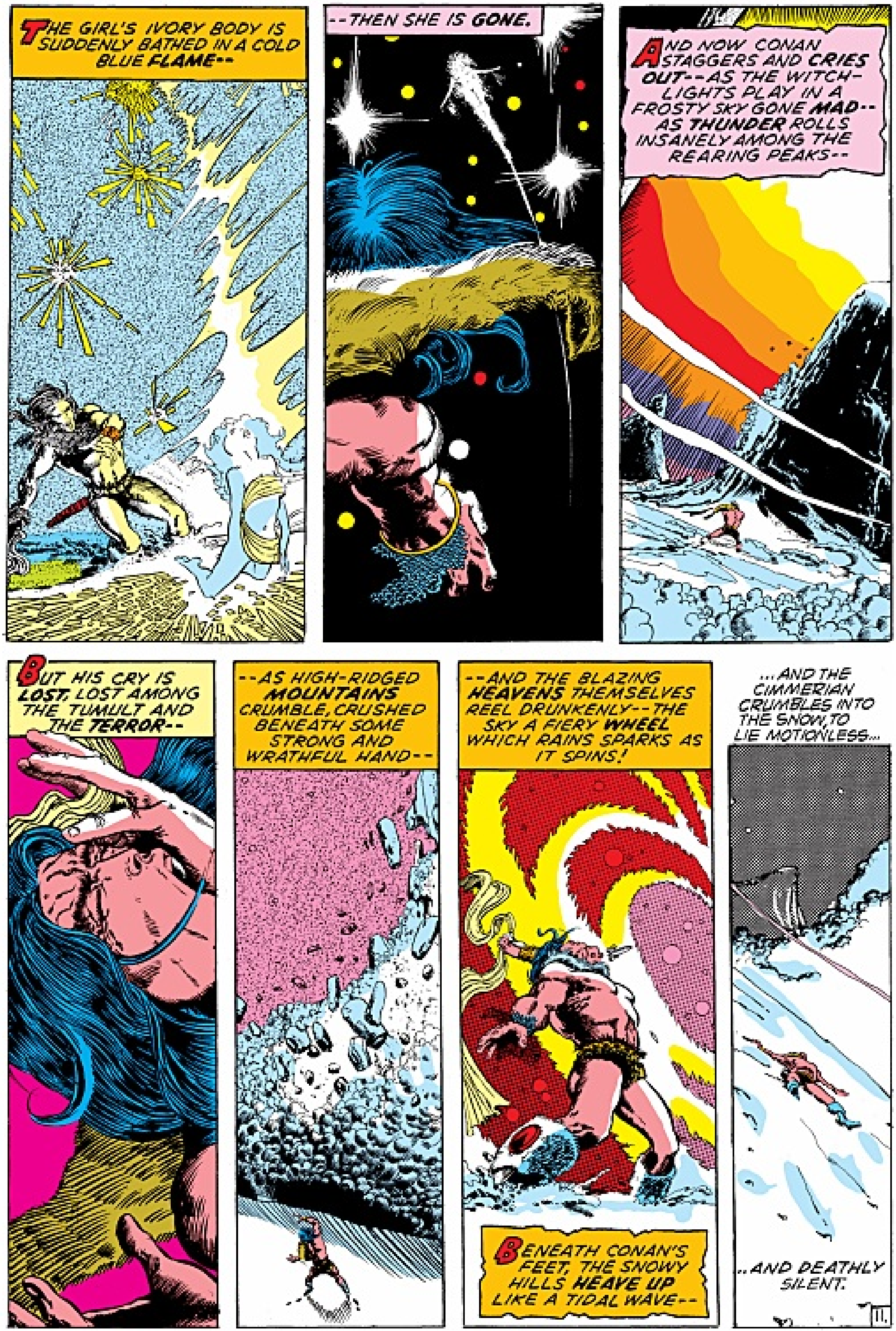

BUT NOW, LOOK ON MY GOLDEN TRESSES... MY LIPS... THESE ICE-PALE LIPS.
AM I NOT BEAUTIFUL, O MAN?
LIKE DAWN RUNNING NAKED ON THE SNOWS.
THEN WHY DO YOU NOT RISE AND PURSUE ME?
HAH! LIE DOWN AND DIE IN THE SNOW WITH THE OTHER FOOLS, CONAN OF THE BLACK HAIR...
YOU CANNOT FOLLOW WHERE I WOULD LEAD.
BY CROM--DARK GOD OF MY OWN RACE--
I WILL FOLLOW YOU--THOUGH THE PITS OF ETERNITY ITSELF SHOULD YAWN BEFORE ME!
RAGE SHAKES CONAN'S SOUL... RAGE, AND LONGING FOR THE WHITE FIGURE WHOSE TAUNTING LAUGHTER MAKES HIS PULSE TO HAMMER IN HIS TEMPLES...
OUT ACROSS THE BLINDING PLAIN LEADS THE CHASE. FORGOTTEN NOW THE FIGHT... THE DEAD WARRIORS... NIORD AND HIS REAVERS... FORGOTTEN ALL BUT THAT SLENDER IVORY SHAPE.
LIGHT AS A FEATHER FLOATING ACROSS A POOL, THE GIRL DANCES THROUGH THE SNOW... HER UNSHOD FEET LEAVING BARELY AN IMPRINT ON THE HOAR-FROST THAT OVERLAYS THE CRUST...

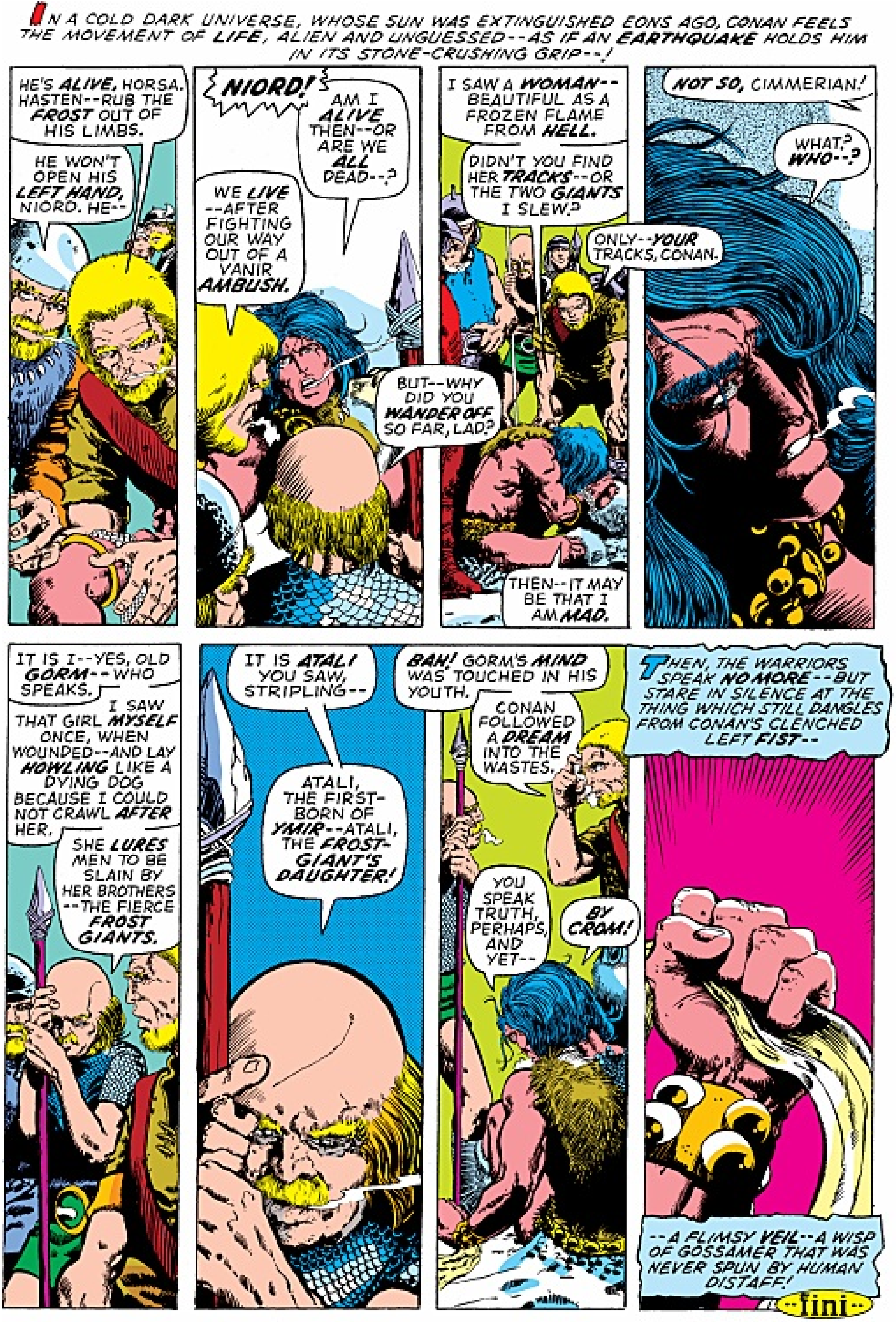

...EVER OUT OF REACH... ...EVER JUST OUT OF REACH...!
SNOW-DRIFTS... THE COLD THAT BITES LIKE A BLADE...
NOTHING CAN HELP YOU ESCAPE ME, WANTON.
LEAD ME INTO A TRAP--AND I'LL PILE THE HEADS OF YOUR KINSMEN AT YOUR FEET!
HIDE FROM ME--AND I'LL TEAR APART THE MOUNTAINS TO FIND YOU!
I'LL FOLLOW YOU TO HELL!
YOU NEED NOT PURSUE ME MUCH LONGER, BARBARIAN.
NO, NOT MUCH LONGER AT ALL!
THE LAND IS CHANGED--AND THE SKY--
IT BLAZES WITH STRANGE LIGHTS--AND STRANGER GLEAMS!
BUT NONE OF THAT MATTERS --NOT AS LONG AS--
BROTHERS! LOOK WHO FOLLOWS!
I HAVE BROUGHT YOU A MAN TO SLAY.
TAKE HIS HEART--THAT WE MAY LAY IT SMOKING ON OUR FATHER'S TABLE!

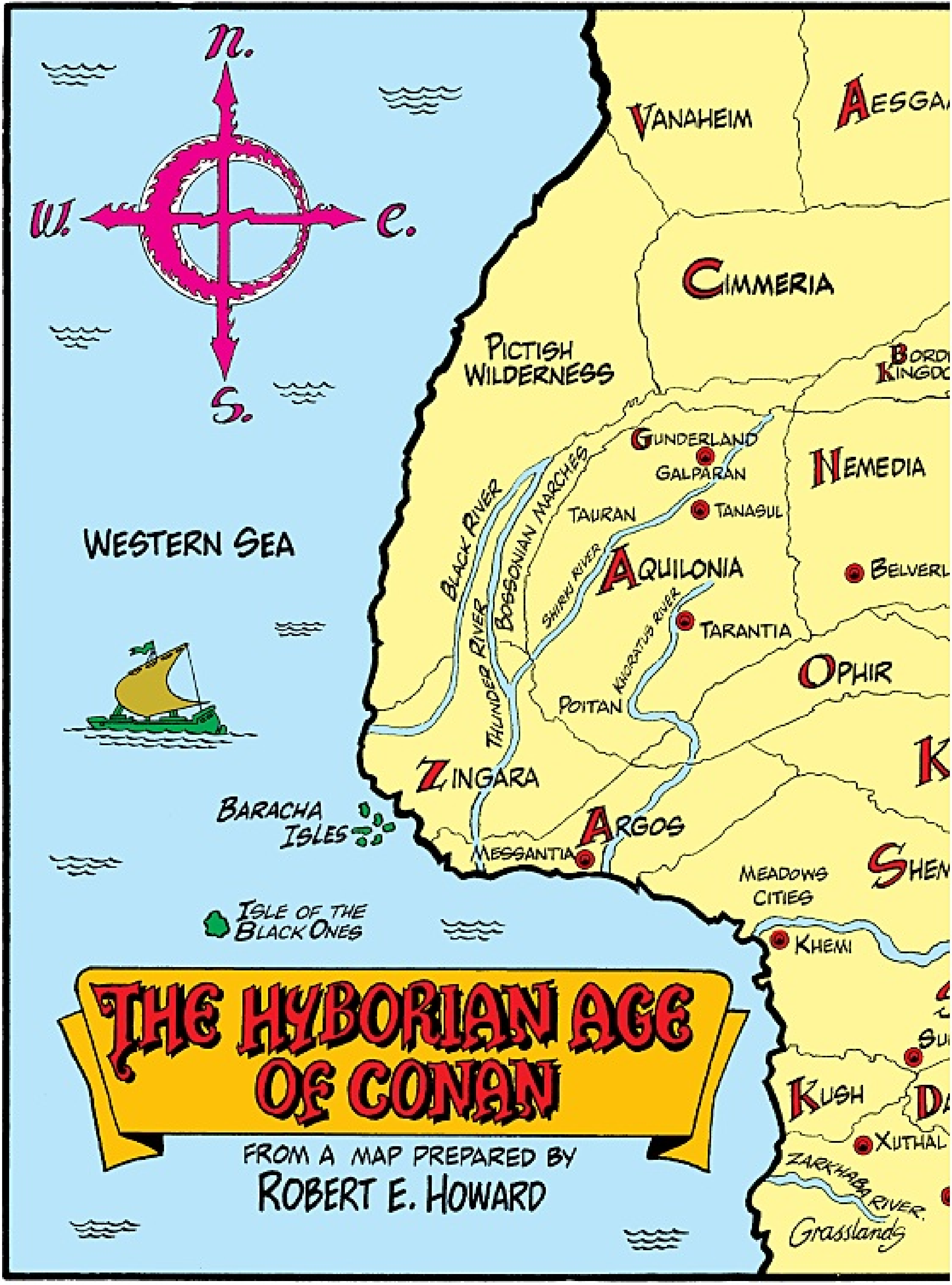

THEIR MAIL-SHIRTS GLISTENING LIKE HOARFROST--A COLD, UNCANNY LIGHT IN THEIR GRIM EYES--THE TWO GIANTS RESPOND WITH ROARS LIKE THE GRINDING OF ICE-BERGS UPON A FROZEN SHORE--
--AS THE MADDENED CIMMERIAN HURLS HIMSELF UPON THEM--!
WHOEVER YOU MAY BE, DOGS--
--YOU'LL NOT KEEP ME FROM THAT MAN-TAUNTING WITCH!
WITH AN UNEARTHLY GROAN, ONE GIGANTIC FORM FALLS--
EVEN AS A FROSTY BATTLE-AXE FLASHES BEFORE CONAN'S EYES, NEARLY BLINDING HIM WITH ITS BRIGHTNESS--!
KILL HIM, MY BROTHER!
HE IS ONLY FLESH AND BLOOD. KILL HIM!
ALL TRACE OF MOCKERY IS GONE NOW FROM THE GIRL'S FACE--AS CONAN'S SWORD SINGS DOWN--
--AND THE REMAINING GIANT BELLOWS THIS TIME NOT IN RAGE--BUT IN PAIN--
THEN, WITH A LAST SURGE OF GODLIKE POWER, THE GIANT LOOMS HIGH ABOVE CONAN--LIKE A COLOSSUS CARVED OF ICE--


--A COLOSSUS WHICH, THE NEXT INSTANT, TOPPLES LIKE A LIFELESS OAK.
THEN, AS THE GIRL STANDS TRANSFIXED WITH HORROR, CONAN CRIES OUT--
CALL THE REST OF YOUR BROTHERS, WENCH!
I'LL GIVE THEIR HEARTS TO THE WOLVES!
YOU CANNOT ESCAPE ME!
THE GIRL IS RUNNING WITH EFFORT NOW-- RUNNING AS IF FOR HER LIFE, HER GOLDEN LOCKS BLOWING FREE--
--AND CONAN HEARS THE QUICK PANTING OF HER BREATH--SEES THE FLASH OF FEAR IN THE LOOK SHE CASTS OVER HER WHITE SHOULDER-- AS THE GAP NARROWS--
--UNTIL--
CROM!
GOT YOU!
YOUR FLESH IS COLD--AS COLD AS THE SNOWS!
PERHAPS IT WILL BE LESS COLD--


--WHEN WARMED BY A BARBARIAN'S KISSES!
BUT THEN--WITH A SCREAM AND A DESPERATE WRENCH--
THE GIRL SLIPS FROM CONAN'S ARMS--
THE WITCH-FIRES IN THE SKY WRITHE EVER MORE WILDLY--LIKE LIVING THINGS--
BUT NO MERE BLAZING LIGHTS WILL KEEP ME FROM--
YMIR! O MY FATHER--
SAVE ME!
AND NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, CONAN BEGINS TO SENSE THE AWESOME FORCES HE HAS OFFENDED--AND FEAR CLAWS ITS WAY UP HIS SPINE--
--AS THE WHOLE SKY SUDDENLY LEAPS INTO ICY FIRE!


THE GIRL'S IVORY BODY IS SUDDENLY BATHED IN A COLD BLUE FLAME--
--THEN SHE IS GONE.
AND NOW CONAN STAGGERS AND CRIES OUT--AS THE WITCH-LIGHTS PLAY IN A FROSTY SKY GONE MAD--AS THUNDER ROLLS INSANELY AMONG THE REARING PEAKS--
BUT HIS CRY IS LOST. LOST AMONG THE TUMULT AND THE TERROR--
--AS HIGH-RIDGED MOUNTAINS CRUMBLE, CRUSHED BENEATH SOME STRONG AND WRATHFUL HAND--
--AND THE BLAZING HEAVENS THEMSELVES REEL DRUNKENLY--THE SKY A FIERY WHEEL WHICH RAINS SPARKS AS IT SPINS!
BENEATH CONAN'S FEET, THE SNOWY HILLS HEAVE UP LIKE A TIDAL WAVE--
...AND THE CIMMERIAN CRUMBLES INTO THE SNOW, TO LIE MOTIONLESS...
..AND DEATHLY SILENT.

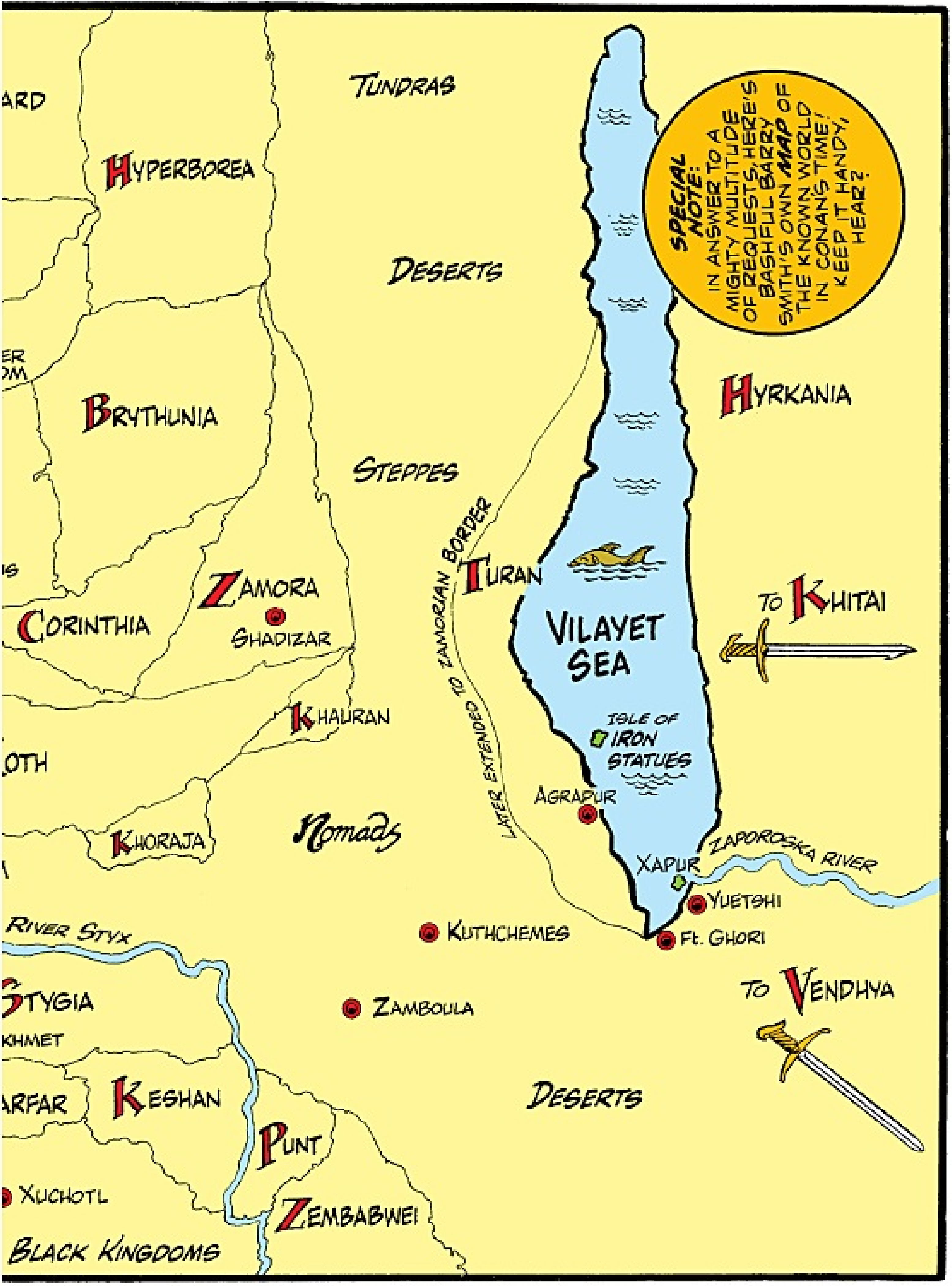

IN A COLD DARK UNIVERSE, WHOSE SUN WAS EXTINGUISHED EONS AGO, CONAN FEELS THE MOVEMENT OF LIFE, ALIEN AND UNGUESSED--AS IF AN EARTHQUAKE HOLDS HIM IN ITS STONE-CRUSHING GRIP--!
HE'S ALIVE, HORSA. HASTEN--RUB THE FROST OUT OF HIS LIMBS.
HE WON'T OPEN HIS LEFT HAND, NIORD. HE--
NIORD!
AM I ALIVE THEN--OR ARE WE ALL DEAD--?
WE LIVE --AFTER FIGHTING OUR WAY OUT OF A VANIR AMBUSH.
BUT--WHY DID YOU WANDER OFF SO FAR, LAD?
I SAW A WOMAN--BEAUTIFUL AS A FROZEN FLAME FROM HELL.
DIDN'T YOU FIND HER TRACKS--OR THE TWO GIANTS I SLEW?
ONLY--YOUR TRACKS, CONAN.
THEN--IT MAY BE THAT I AM MAD.
NOT SO, CIMMERIAN!
WHAT? WHO--?
IT IS I--YES, OLD GORM--WHO SPEAKS.
I SAW THAT GIRL MYSELF ONCE, WHEN WOUNDED--AND LAY HOWLING LIKE A DYING DOG BECAUSE I COULD NOT CRAWL AFTER HER.
SHE LURES MEN TO BE SLAIN BY HER BROTHERS --THE FIERCE FROST GIANTS.
IT IS ATALI YOU SAW, STRIPLING--
ATALI, THE FIRST-BORN OF YMIR--ATALI, THE FROST-GIANT'S DAUGHTER!
BAH! GORM'S MIND WAS TOUCHED IN HIS YOUTH.
CONAN FOLLOWED A DREAM INTO THE WASTES.
YOU SPEAK TRUTH, PERHAPS, AND YET--
BY CROM!
THEN, THE WARRIORS SPEAK NO MORE--BUT STARE IN SILENCE AT THE THING WHICH STILL DANGLES FROM CONAN'S CLENCHED LEFT FIST--
--A FLIMSY VEIL--A WISP OF GOSSAMER THAT WAS NEVER SPUN BY HUMAN DISTAFF!
-fini-



THE HYBORIAN AGE OF CONAN

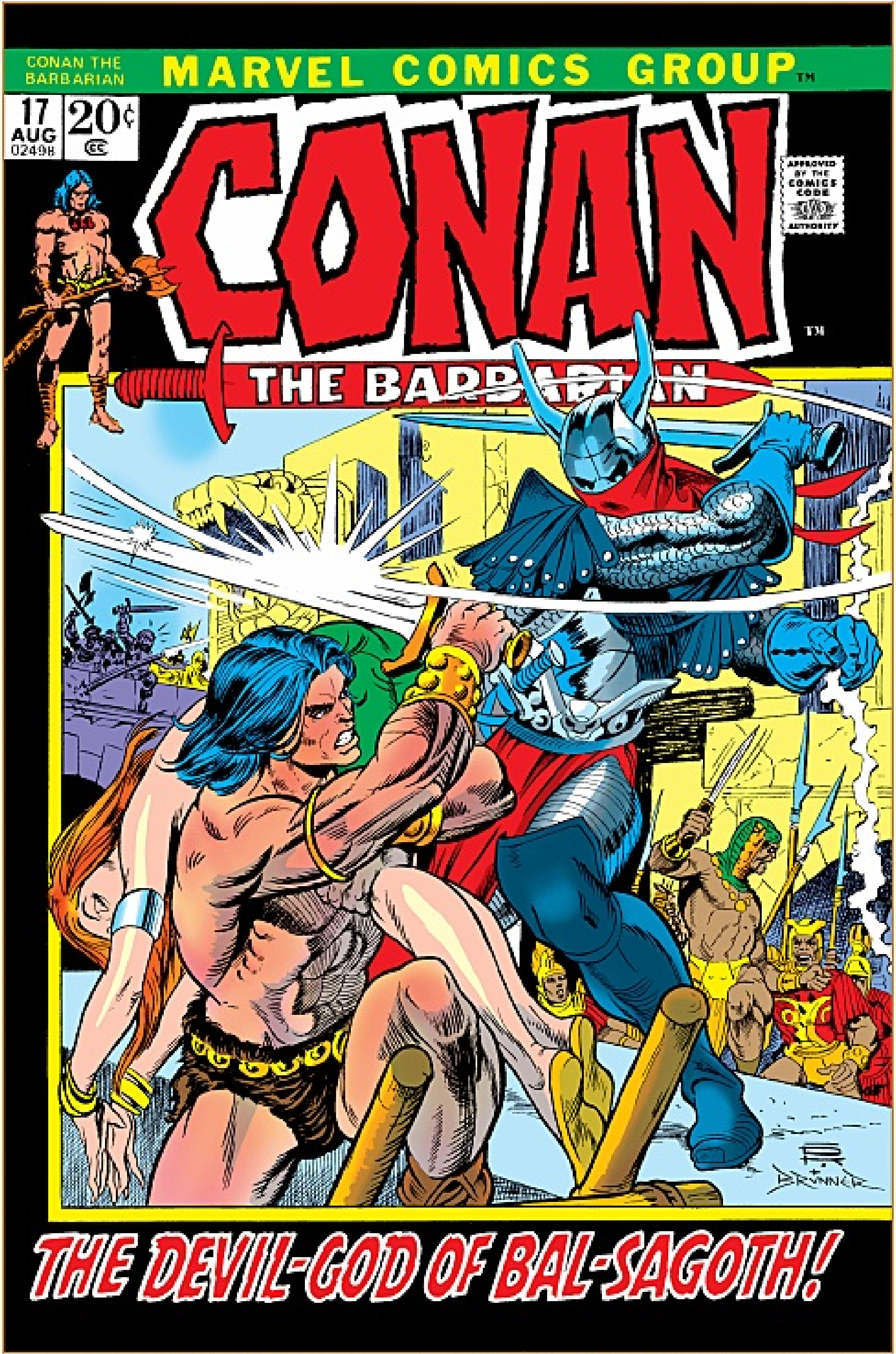
FROM A MAP PREPARED BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD

N.
W.
E.
S.
WESTERN SEA
VANAHEIM
AESGA
CIMMERIA
PICTISH WILDERNESS
BORD
KINGDO
GUNDERLAND
GALPARAN
NEMEDIA
TAURAN
TANASUL
BLACK RIVER
BOSSONIAN MARCHES
SHIRKI RIVER
AQUILONIA
BELVERL
THUNDER RIVER
KHORATUS RIVER
TARANTIA
OPHIR
POITAN
K
ZINGARA
BARACHA ISLES
ARGOS
MESSANTIA
SHEM
MEADOWS CITIES
ISLE OF THE BLACK ONES
KHEMI
SU
KUSH
DA
XUTHAL
ZARKHEBA RIVER
Grasslands



SPECIAL NOTE: IN ANSWER TO A MIGHTY MULTITUDE OF REQUESTS, HERE'S BASHFUL BARRY SMITH'S OWN **MAP** OF THE KNOWN WORLD IN CONAN'S TIME! KEEP IT HANDY, HEAR?

TUNDRAS
ARD
HYPERBOREA
DESERTS
ER
OM
BRYTHUNIA
HYRKANIA
STEPPES
LATER EXTENDED TO ZAMORIAN BORDER
IS
TURAN
ZAMORA
CORINTHIA
SHADIZAR
TO KHITAI
VILAYET SEA
KHAURAN
OTH
ISLE OF IRON STATUES
AGRAPUR
Nomads
KHORAJA
XAPUR
ZAPOROSKA RIVER
YUETSHI
RIVER STYX
KUTHCHEMES
FT. GHORI
TYGIA
TO VENDHYA
ZAMBOULA
KHMET
ARFAR
KESHAN
DESERTS
PUNT
XUCHOTL
ZEMBABWEI
BLACK KINGDOMS


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP™
17
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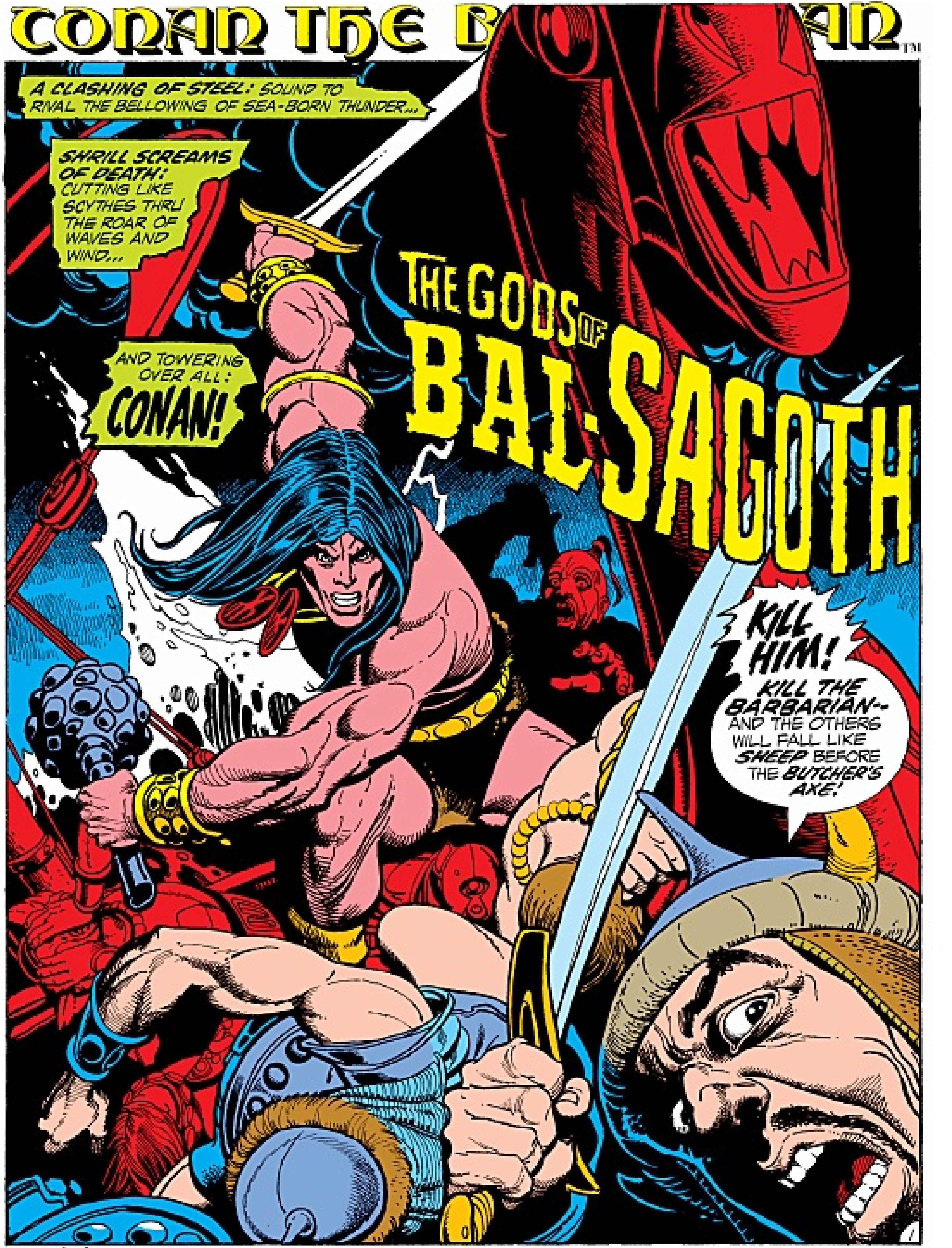
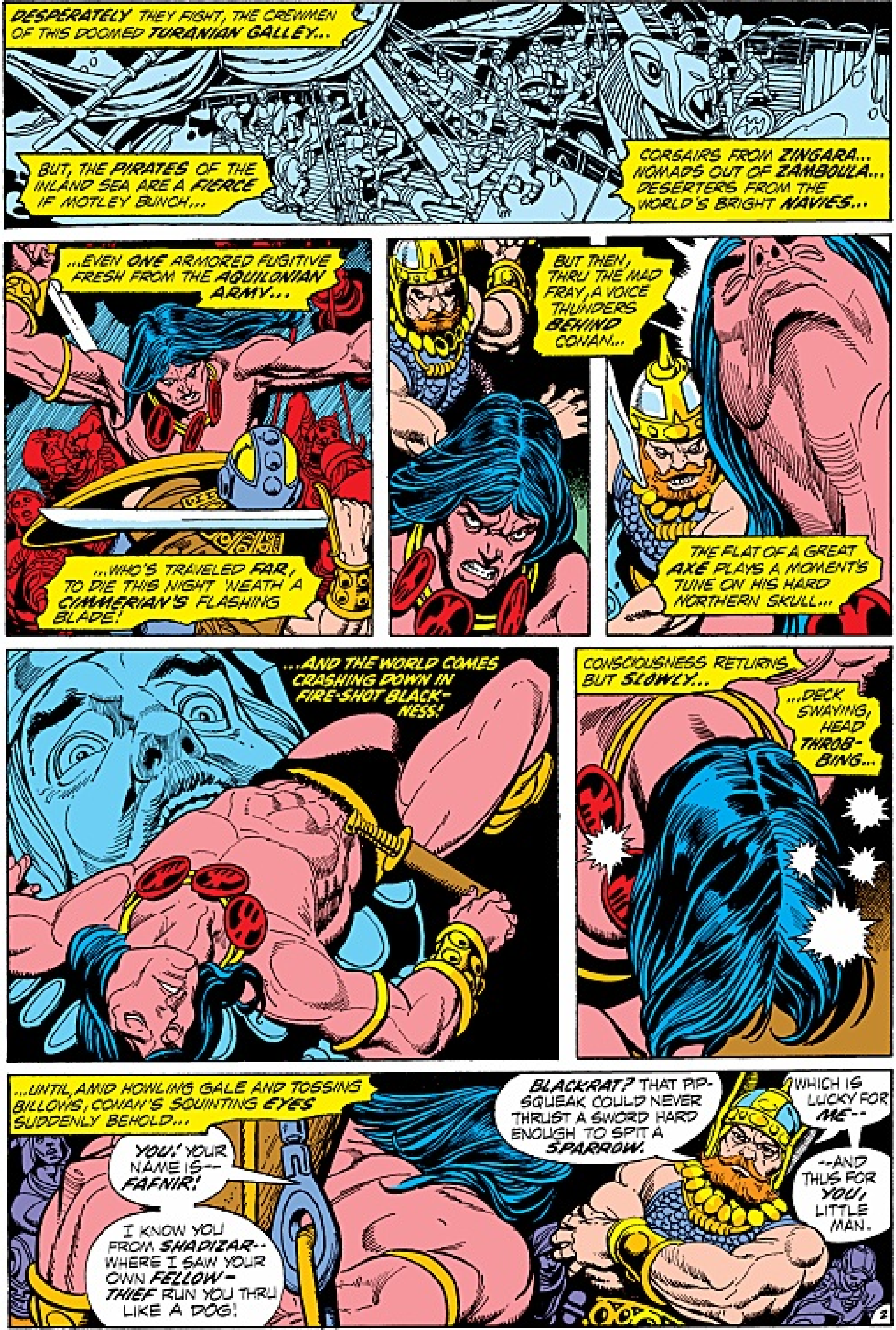
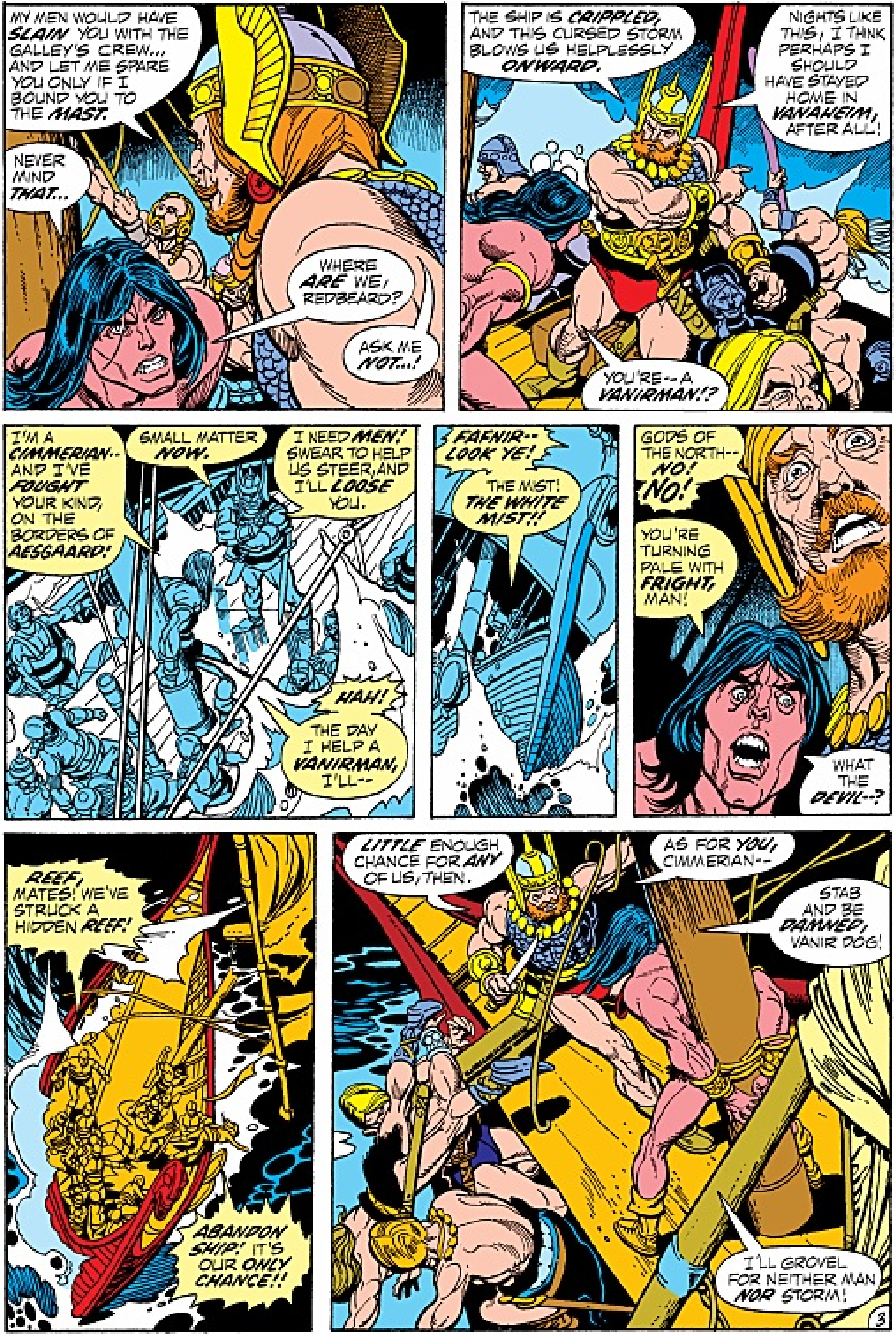
02498
20¢
CC
CONAN
™
THE BARBARIAN
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
R. BRUNNER
THE DEVIL-GOD OF BAL-SAGOTH!

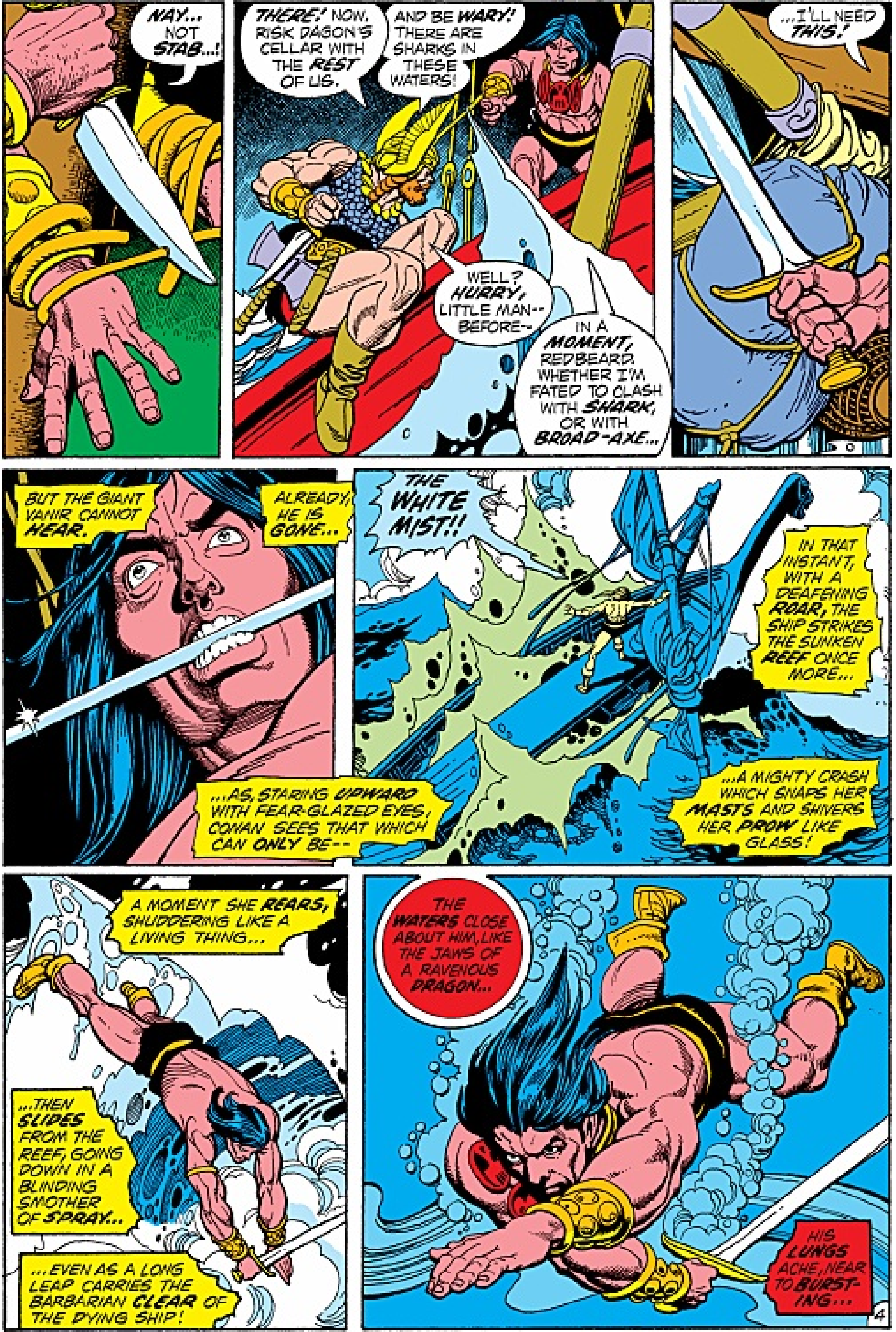
COVER PENCILER: GIL KANE COVER INKER: FRANK BRUNNER

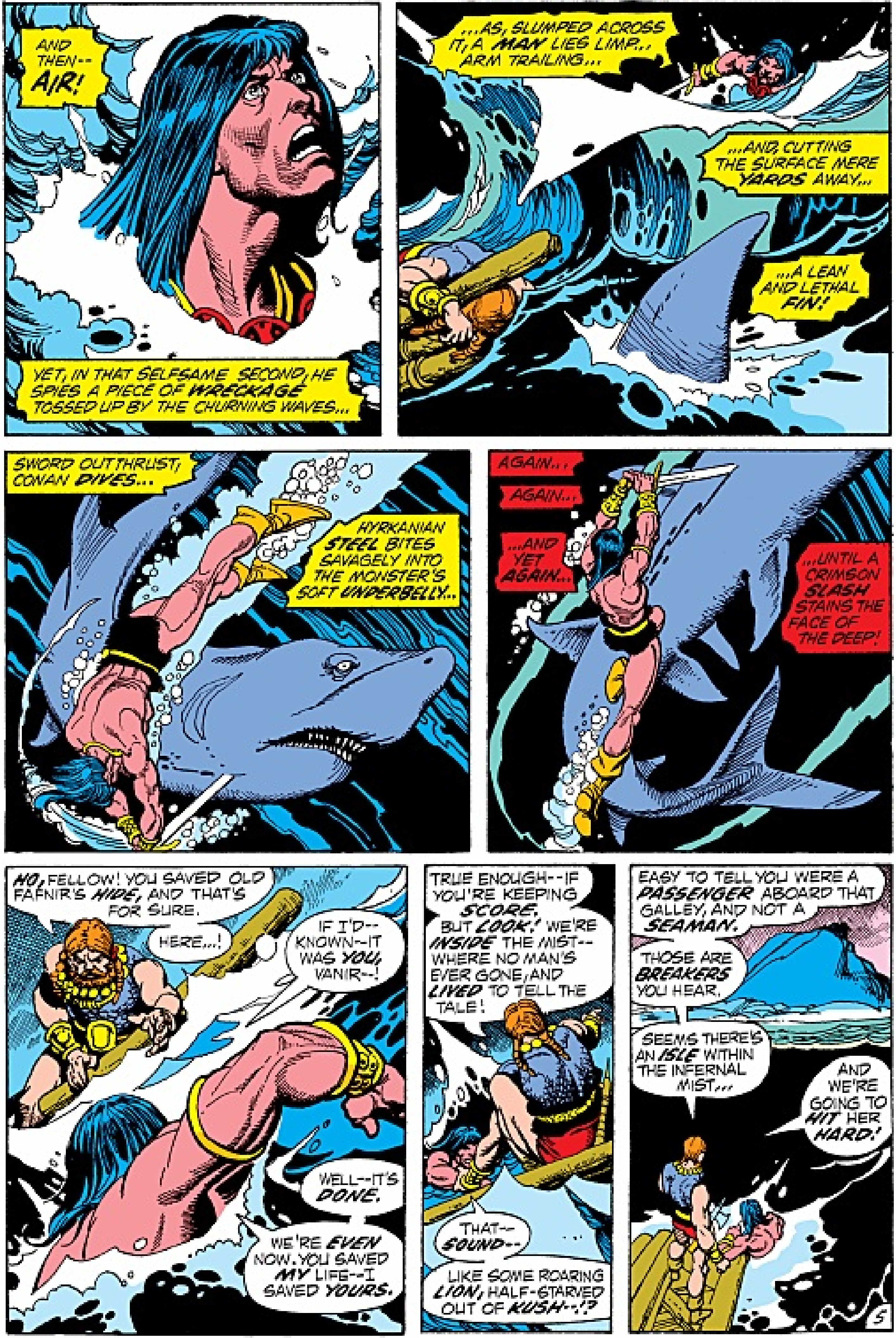

CONAN THE B AN
A CLASHING OF STEEL: SOUND TO RIVAL THE BELLOWING OF SEA-BORN THUNDER...
SHRILL SCREAMS OF DEATH: CUTTING LIKE SCYTHES THRU THE ROAR OF WAVES AND WIND...
AND TOWERING OVER ALL: CONAN!
THE GODS OF BAL-SAGOTH
KILL HIM! KILL THE BARBARIAN-- AND THE OTHERS WILL FALL LIKE SHEEP BEFORE THE BUTCHER'S AXE!

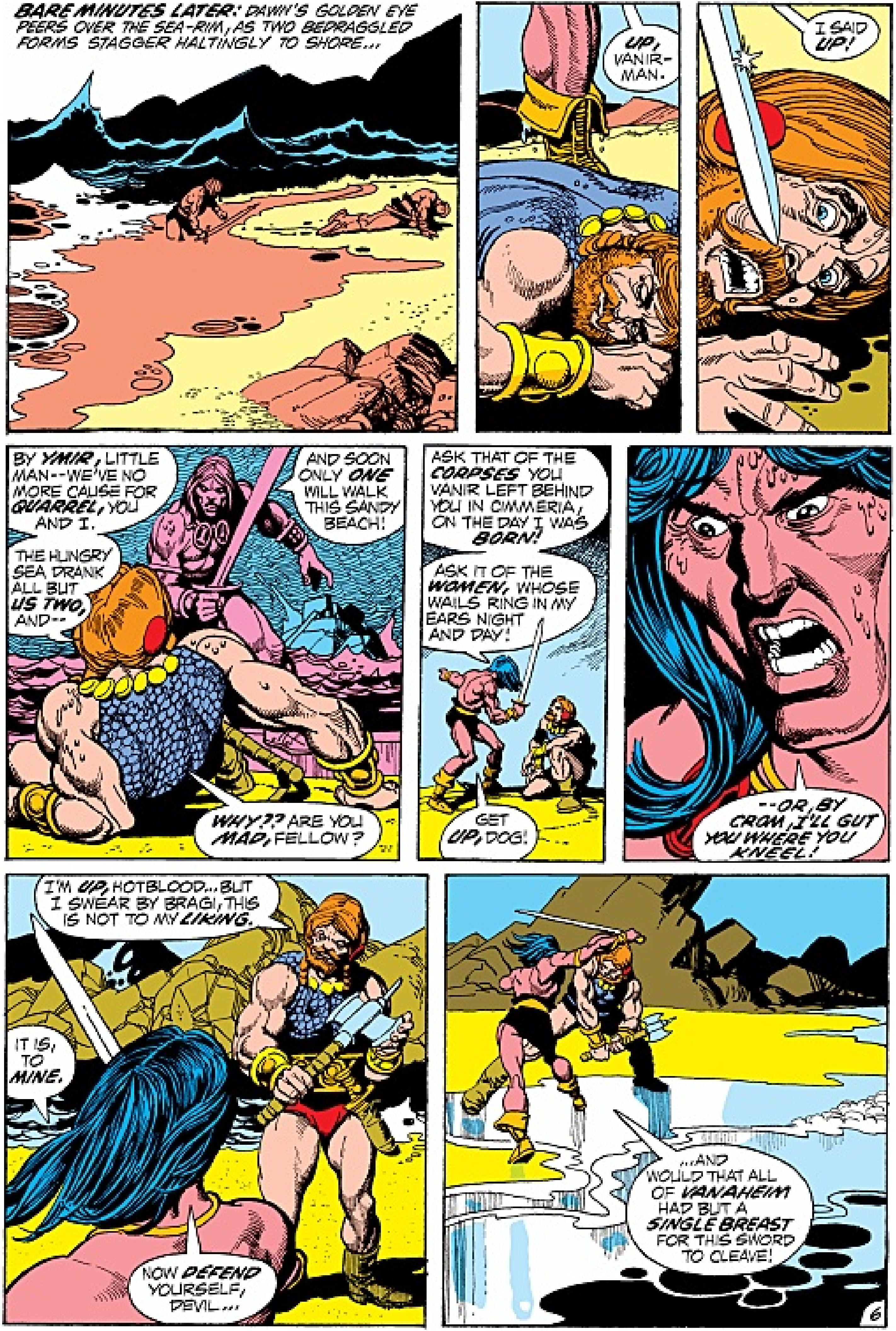
STAN LEE PRESENTS: ✱ **ROY THOMAS** WRITER ✱ **GIL KANE** ARTIST ✱ **RALPH REESE**, INKER **JON COSTA**, LETTERER ✱ ADAPTED FROM THE STORY BY: **ROBERT E. HOWARD** CREATOR OF CONAN

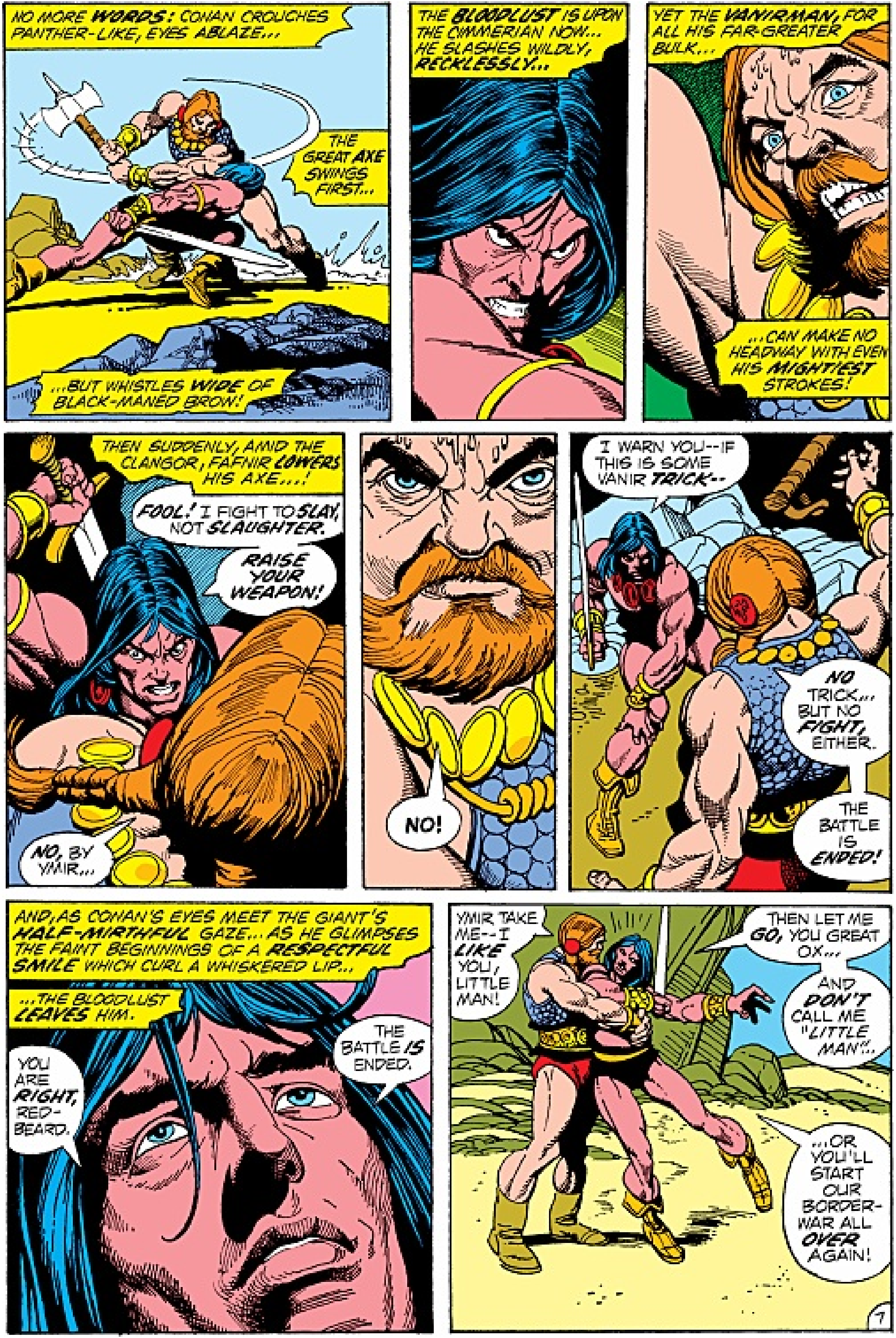

DESPERATELY THEY FIGHT, THE CREWMEN OF THIS DOOMED TURANIAN GALLEY...
BUT, THE PIRATES OF THE INLAND SEA ARE A FIERCE IF MOTLEY BUNCH...
CORSAIRS FROM ZINGARA... NOMADS OUT OF ZAMBOULA... DESERTERS FROM THE WORLD'S BRIGHT NAVIES...
...EVEN ONE ARMORED FUGITIVE FRESH FROM THE AQUILONIAN ARMY...
...WHO'S TRAVELED FAR, TO DIE THIS NIGHT 'NEATH A CIMMERIAN'S FLASHING BLADE!
BUT THEN, THRU THE MAD FRAY, A VOICE THUNDERS BEHIND CONAN...
THE FLAT OF A GREAT AXE PLAYS A MOMENT'S TUNE ON HIS HARD NORTHERN SKULL...
...AND THE WORLD COMES CRASHING DOWN IN FIRE-SHOT BLACKNESS!
CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNS, BUT SLOWLY...
...DECK SWAYING, HEAD THROBBING...
...UNTIL, AMID HOWLING GALE AND TOSSING BILLOWS, CONAN'S SQUINTING EYES SUDDENLY BEHOLD...
YOU! YOUR NAME IS-- FAFNIR!
I KNOW YOU FROM SHADIZAR-- WHERE I SAW YOUR OWN FELLOW-THIEF RUN YOU THRU LIKE A DOG!
BLACKRAT? THAT PIPSQUEAK COULD NEVER THRUST A SWORD HARD ENOUGH TO SPIT A SPARROW.
WHICH IS LUCKY FOR ME--
--AND THUS FOR YOU, LITTLE MAN.

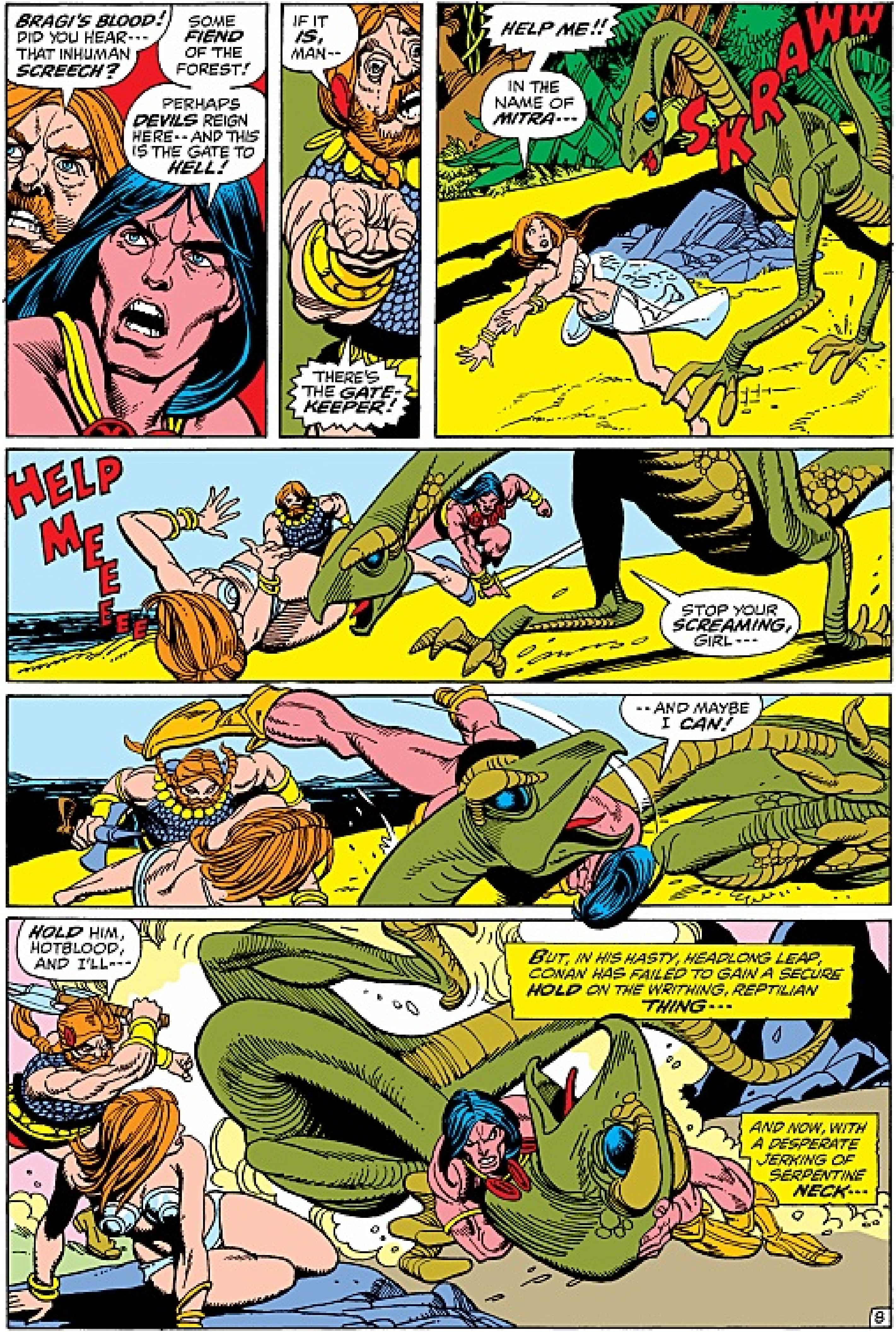

MY MEN WOULD HAVE SLAIN YOU WITH THE GALLEY'S CREW... AND LET ME SPARE YOU ONLY IF I BOUND YOU TO THE MAST.
NEVER MIND THAT...
WHERE ARE WE, REDBEARD?
ASK ME NOT...!
THE SHIP IS CRIPPLED, AND THIS CURSED STORM BLOWS US HELPLESSLY ONWARD.
NIGHTS LIKE THIS, I THNK PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE STAYED HOME IN VANAHEIM, AFTER ALL!
YOU'RE-- A VANIRMAN!?
I'M A CIMMERIAN-- AND I'VE FOUGHT YOUR KIND, ON THE BORDERS OF AESGAARD!
SMALL MATTER NOW.
I NEED MEN! SWEAR TO HELP US STEER, AND I'LL LOOSE YOU.
HAH!
THE DAY I HELP A VANIRMAN, I'LL--
FAFNIR-- LOOK YE!
THE MIST! THE WHITE MIST!!
GODS OF THE NORTH-- NO! NO!
YOU'RE TURNING PALE WITH FRIGHT, MAN!
WHAT THE DEVIL--?
REEF, MATES! WE'VE STRUCK A HIDDEN REEF!
ABANDON SHIP! IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!!
LITTLE ENOUGH CHANCE FOR ANY OF US, THEN.
AS FOR YOU, CIMMERIAN--
STAB AND BE DAMNED, VANIR DOG!
I'LL GROVEL FOR NEITHER MAN NOR STORM!

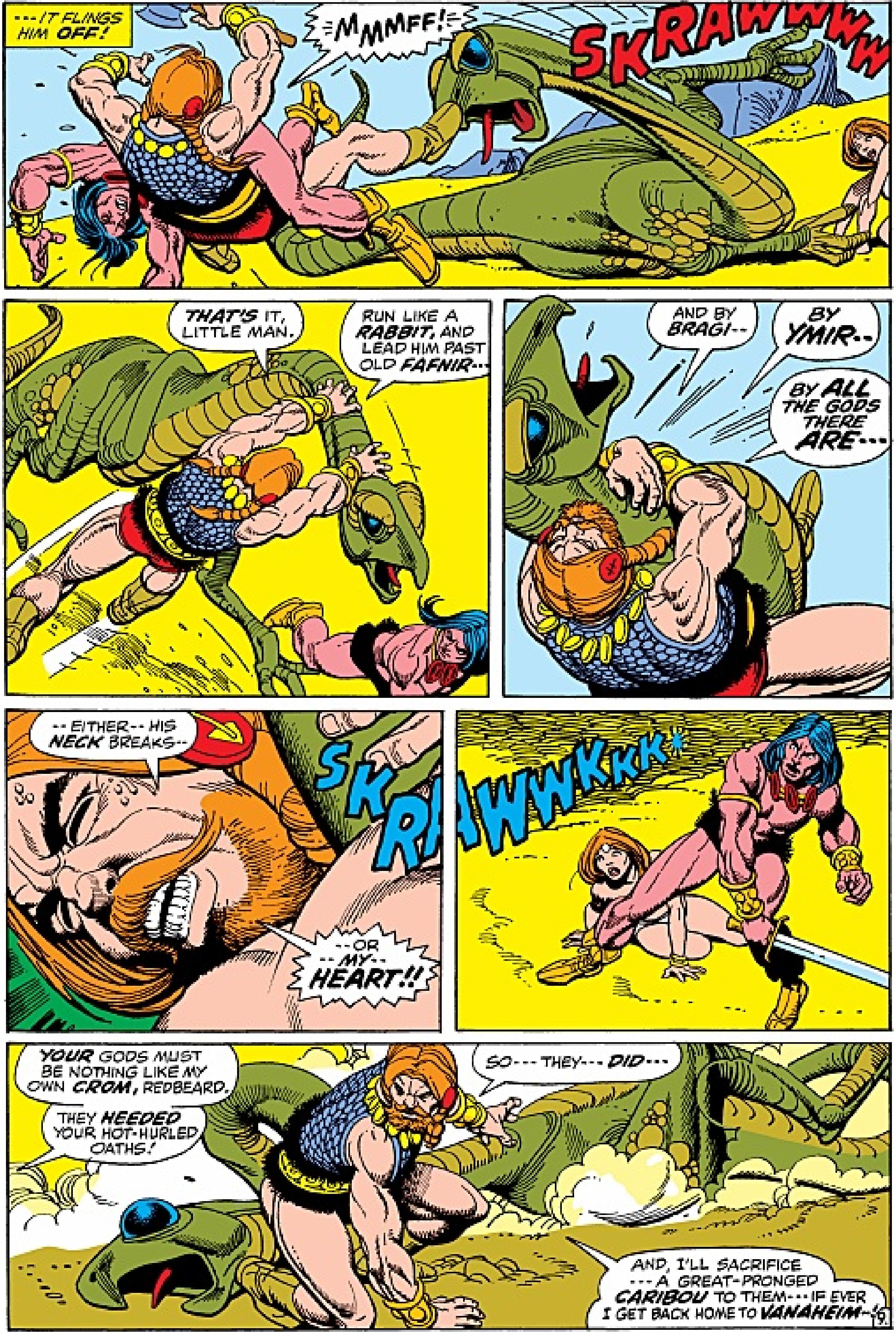

NAY... NOT STAB...!
THERE! NOW. RISK DAGON'S CELLAR WITH THE REST OF US.
AND BE WARY! THERE ARE SHARKS IN THESE WATERS!
WELL? HURRY, LITTLE MAN-- BEFORE--
IN A MOMENT, REDBEARD. WHETHER I'M FATED TO CLASH WITH SHARK, OR WITH BROAD-AXE...
...I'LL NEED THIS!
BUT THE GIANT VANIR CANNOT HEAR.
ALREADY, HE IS GONE...
...AS, STARING UPWARD WITH FEAR-GLAZED EYES, CONAN SEES THAT WHICH CAN ONLY BE--
THE WHITE MIST!!
IN THAT INSTANT, WITH A DEAFENING ROAR, THE SHIP STRIKES THE SUNKEN REEF ONCE MORE...
...A MIGHTY CRASH WHICH SNAPS HER MASTS AND SHIVERS HER PROW LIKE GLASS!
A MOMENT SHE REARS, SHUDDERING LIKE A LIVING THING...
...THEN SLIDES FROM THE REEF, GOING DOWN IN A BLINDING SMOTHER OF SPRAY...
...EVEN AS A LONG LEAP CARRIES THE BARBARIAN CLEAR OF THE DYING SHIP!
THE WATERS CLOSE ABOUT HIM, LIKE THE JAWS OF A RAVENOUS DRAGON...
HIS LUNGS ACHE, NEAR TO BURSTING...

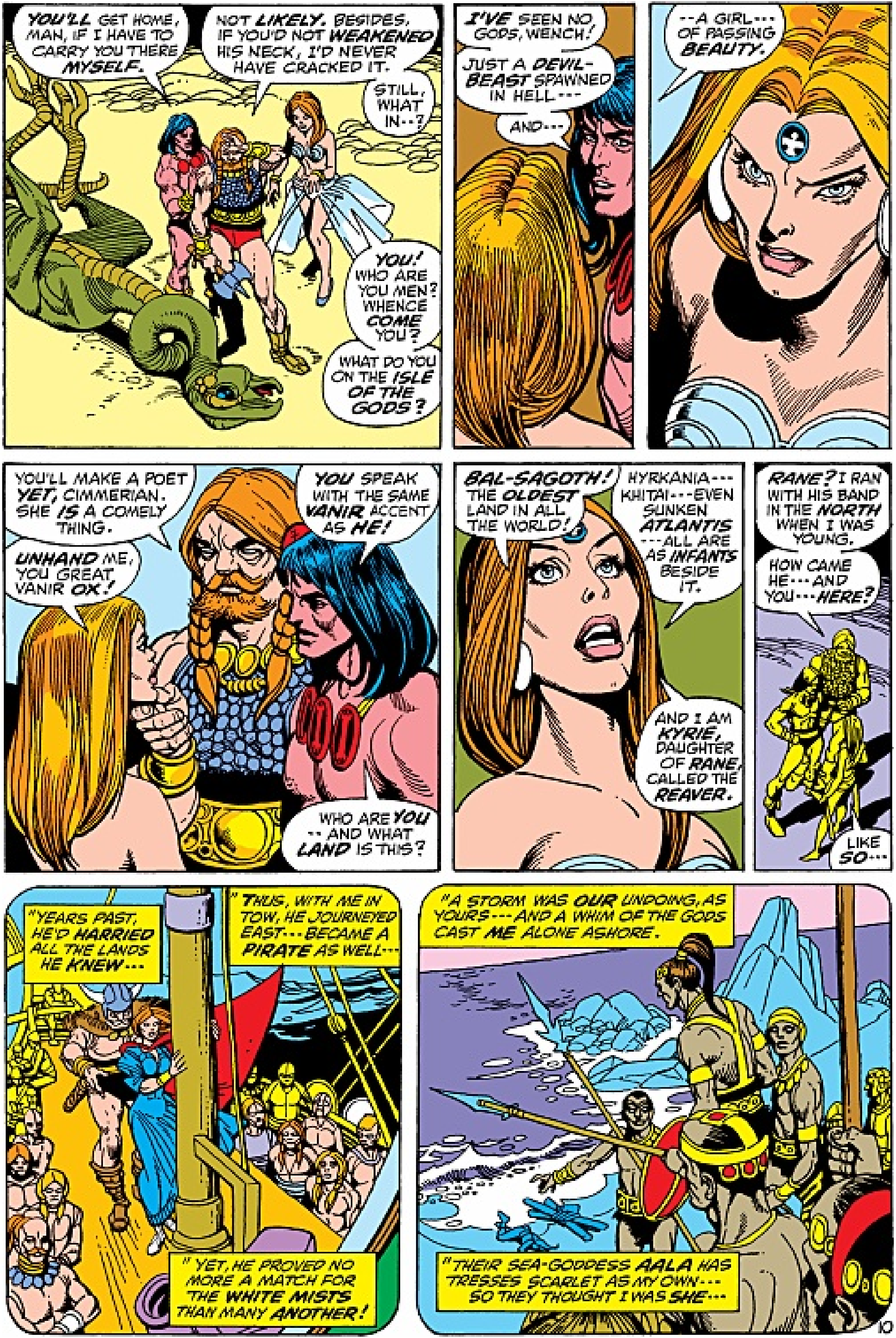

AND THEN-- AIR!
YET, IN THAT SELFSAME SECOND, HE SPIES A PIECE OF WRECKAGE TOSSED UP BY THE CHURNING WAVES...
...AS, SLUMPED ACROSS IT, A MAN LIES LIMP... ARM TRAILING...
...AND, CUTTING THE SURFACE MERE YARDS AWAY...
...A LEAN AND LETHAL FIN!
SWORD OUTTHRUST, CONAN DIVES...
HYRKANIAN STEEL BITES SAVAGELY INTO THE MONSTER'S SOFT UNDERBELLY...
AGAIN...
AGAIN...
...AND YET AGAIN...
...UNTIL A CRIMSON SLASH STAINS THE FACE OF THE DEEP!
NO, FELLOW! YOU SAVED OLD FAFNIR'S HIDE, AND THAT'S FOR SURE.
HERE...!
IF I'D-- KNOWN--IT WAS YOU, VANIR--!
WELL--IT'S DONE.
WE'RE EVEN NOW. YOU SAVED MY LIFE--I SAVED YOURS.
TRUE ENOUGH--IF YOU'RE KEEPING SCORE. BUT LOOK! WE'RE INSIDE THE MIST--WHERE NO MAN'S EVER GONE, AND LIVED TO TELL THE TALE!
THAT-- SOUND--
LIKE SOME ROARING LION, HALF-STARVED OUT OF KUSH--!?
EASY TO TELL YOU WERE A PASSENGER ABOARD THAT GALLEY, AND NOT A SEAMAN.
THOSE ARE BREAKERS YOU HEAR.
SEEMS THERE'S AN ISLE WITHIN THE INFERNAL MIST...
AND WE'RE GOING TO HIT HER HARD!

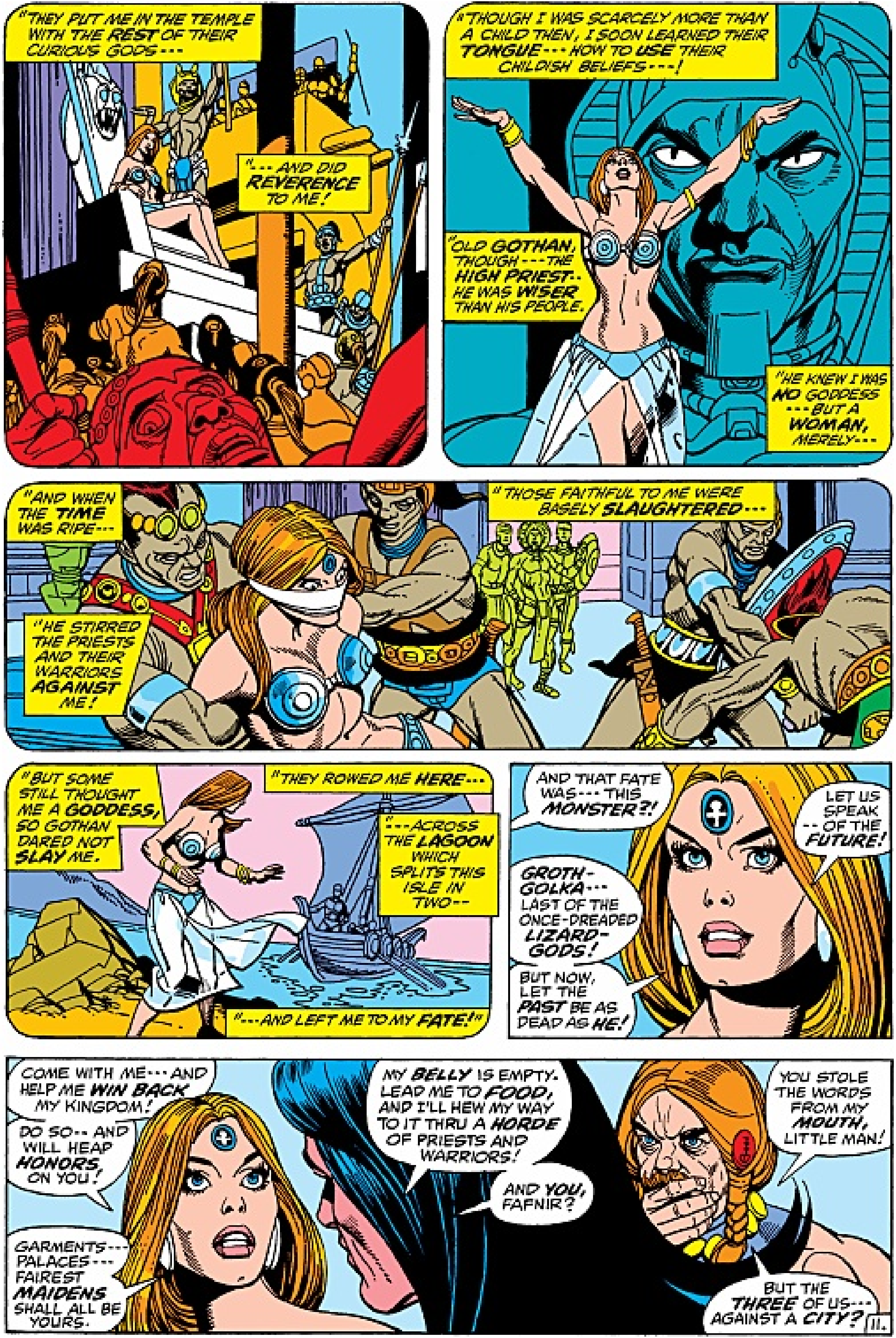

BARE MINUTES LATER: DAWN'S GOLDEN EYE PEERS OVER THE SEA-RIM, AS TWO BEDRAGGLED FORMS STAGGER HALTINGLY TO SHORE...
UP, VANIR-MAN.
I SAID UP!
BY YMIR, LITTLE MAN--WE'VE NO MORE CAUSE FOR QUARREL, YOU AND I.
THE HUNGRY SEA DRANK ALL BUT US TWO, AND--
AND SOON ONLY ONE WILL WALK THIS SANDY BEACH!
WHY?? ARE YOU MAD, FELLOW?
ASK THAT OF THE CORPSES YOU VANIR LEFT BEHIND YOU IN CIMMERIA, ON THE DAY I WAS BORN!
ASK IT OF THE WOMEN, WHOSE WAILS RING IN MY EARS NIGHT AND DAY!
GET UP, DOG!
--OR, BY CROM, I'LL GUT YOU WHERE YOU KNEEL!
I'M UP, HOTBLOOD... BUT I SWEAR BY BRAGI, THIS IS NOT TO MY LIKING.
IT IS, TO MINE.
NOW DEFEND YOURSELF, DEVIL...
...AND WOULD THAT ALL OF VANAHEIM HAD BUT A SINGLE BREAST FOR THIS SWORD TO CLEAVE!
6

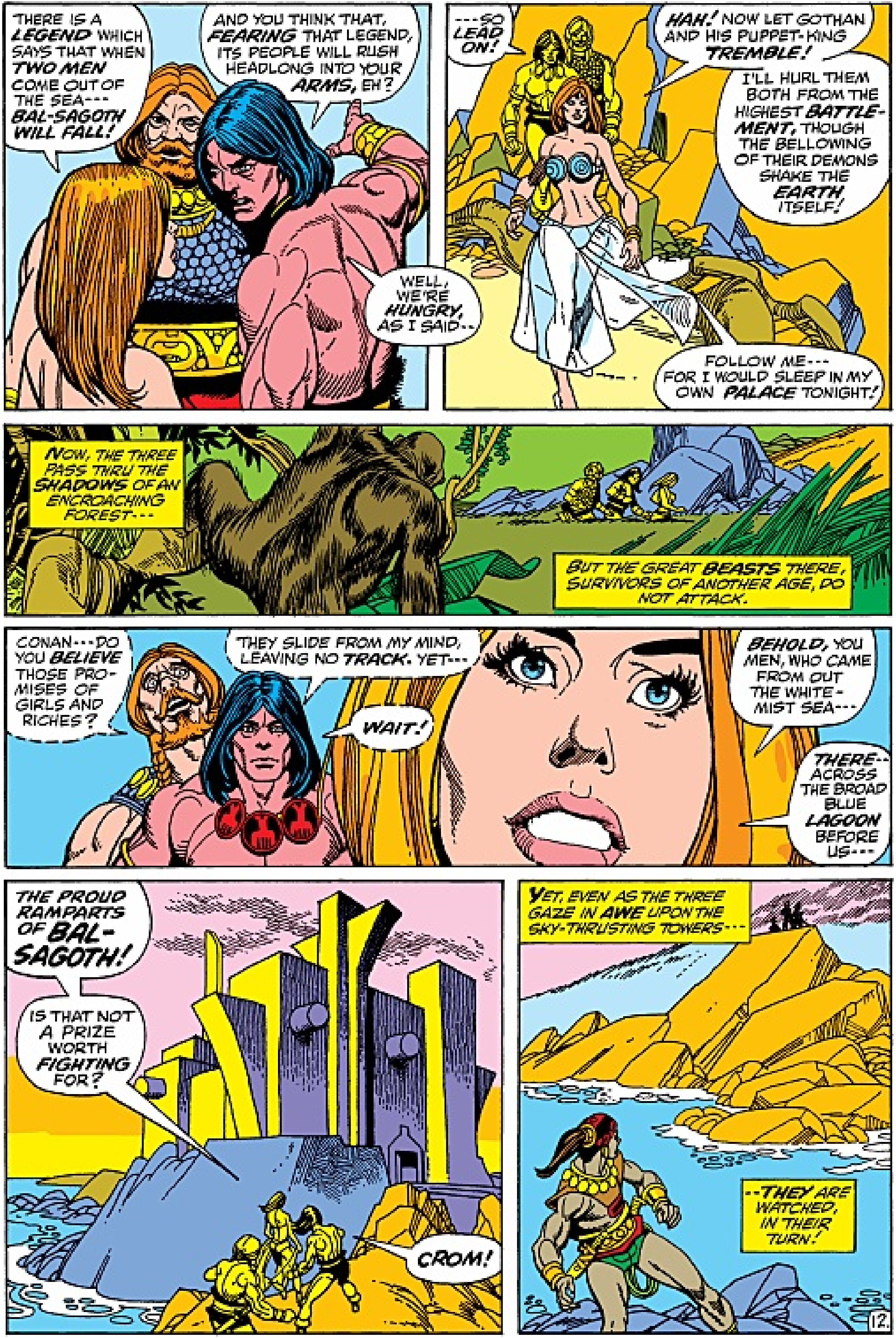

NO MORE WORDS: CONAN CROUCHES PANTHER-LIKE, EYES ABLAZE...
THE GREAT AXE SWINGS FIRST...
...BUT WHISTLES WIDE OF BLACK-MANED BROW!
THE BLOODLUST IS UPON THE CIMMERIAN NOW... HE SLASHES WILDLY, RECKLESSLY...
YET THE VANIRMAN, FOR ALL HIS FAR-GREATER BULK...
...CAN MAKE NO HEADWAY WITH EVEN HIS MIGHTIEST STROKES!
THEN SUDDENLY, AMID THE CLANGOR, FAFNIR LOWERS HIS AXE...!
FOOL! I FIGHT TO SLAY, NOT SLAUGHTER.
RAISE YOUR WEAPON!
NO, BY YMIR...
NO!
I WARN YOU--IF THIS IS SOME VANIR TRICK--
NO TRICK... BUT NO FIGHT, EITHER.
THE BATTLE IS ENDED!
AND, AS CONAN'S EYES MEET THE GIANT'S HALF-MIRTHFUL GAZE... AS HE GLIMPSES THE FAINT BEGINNINGS OF A RESPECTFUL SMILE WHICH CURL A WHISKERED LIP...
...THE BLOODLUST LEAVES HIM.
THE BATTLE IS ENDED.
YOU ARE RIGHT, RED-BEARD.
YMIR TAKE ME--I LIKE YOU, LITTLE MAN!
THEN LET ME GO, YOU GREAT OX...
AND DON'T CALL ME "LITTLE MAN"!..
...OR YOU'LL START OUR BORDER-WAR ALL OVER AGAIN!

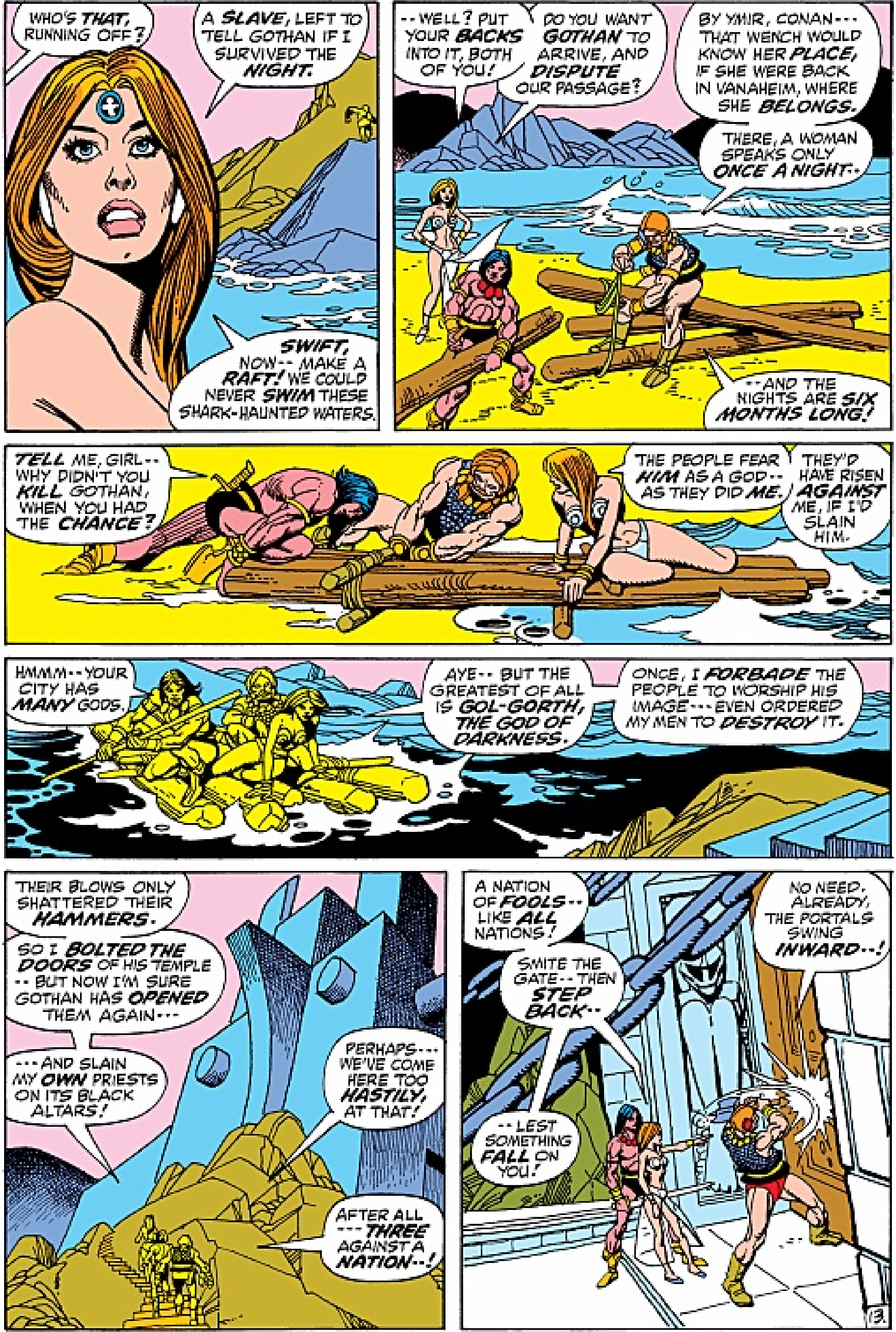

BRAGI'S BLOOD! DID YOU HEAR--- THAT INHUMAN SCREECH?
SOME FIEND OF THE FOREST!
PERHAPS DEVILS REIGN HERE-- AND THIS IS THE GATE TO HELL!
IF IT IS, MAN--
THERE'S THE GATE-KEEPER!
HELP ME!!
IN THE NAME OF MITRA---
SKRAWW
HELP MEEEEEE
STOP YOUR SCREAMING, GIRL---
--AND MAYBE I CAN!
HOLD HIM, HOTBLOOD, AND I'LL---
BUT, IN HIS HASTY, HEADLONG LEAP, CONAN HAS FAILED TO GAIN A SECURE HOLD ON THE WRITHING, REPTILIAN THING---
AND NOW, WITH A DESPERATE JERKING OF SERPENTINE NECK---

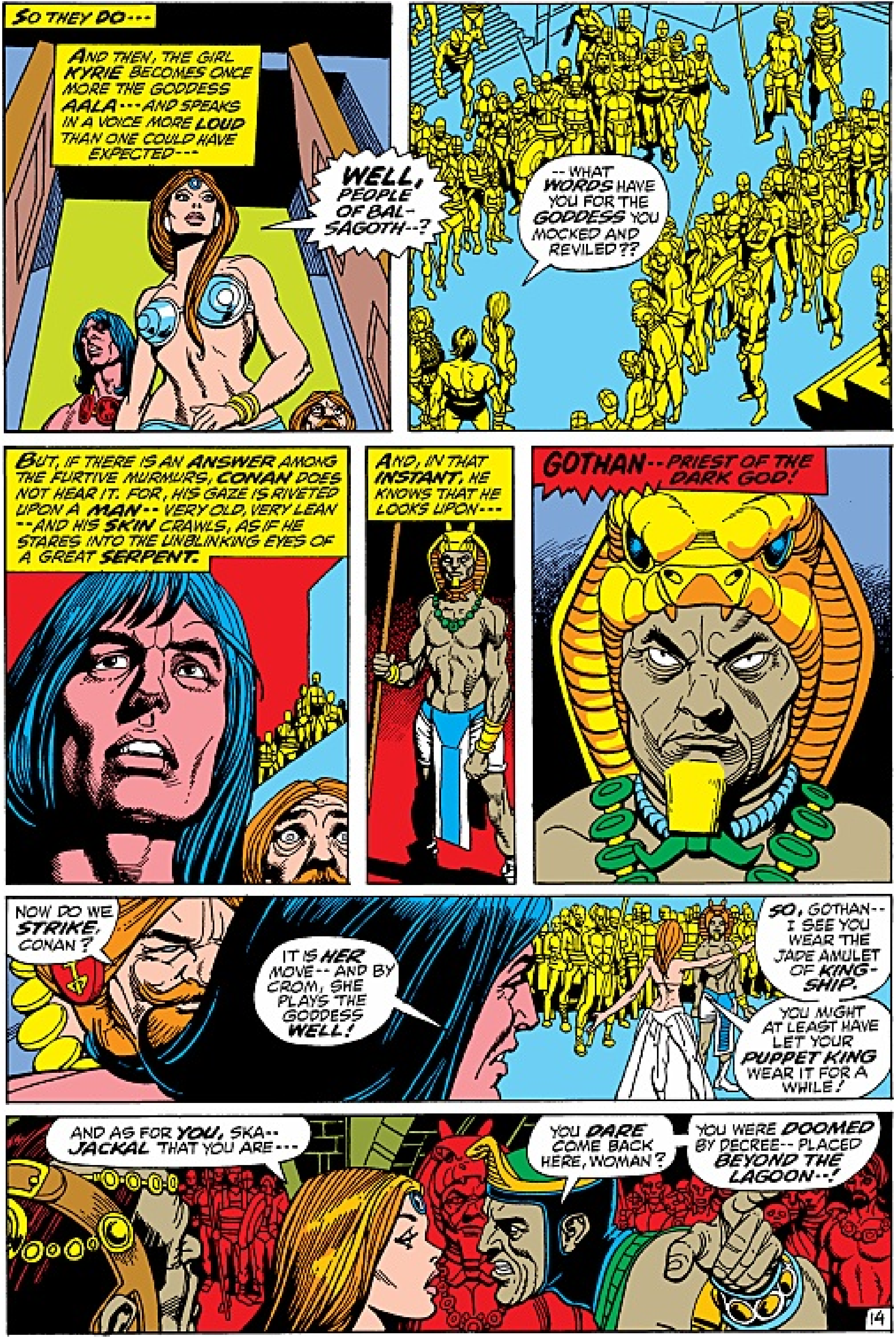

---IT FLINGS HIM *OFF!*
MMMFF!
SKRAWWWW
THAT'S IT, LITTLE MAN.
RUN LIKE A *RABBIT,* AND LEAD HIM PAST OLD *FAFNIR*---
BY *YMIR*--
AND BY *BRAGI*--
BY *ALL* THE GODS THERE *ARE*---
--EITHER-- HIS *NECK* BREAKS--
SKRAWWKKK
--OR --*MY*-- *HEART!!*
YOUR GODS MUST BE NOTHING LIKE MY OWN *CROM,* REDBEARD.
THEY *NEEDED* YOUR HOT-HURLED OATHS!
SO--- THEY--- *DID*---
AND, I'LL SACRIFICE ---A GREAT-PRONGED *CARIBOU* TO THEM---IF EVER I GET BACK HOME TO *VANAHEIM*--

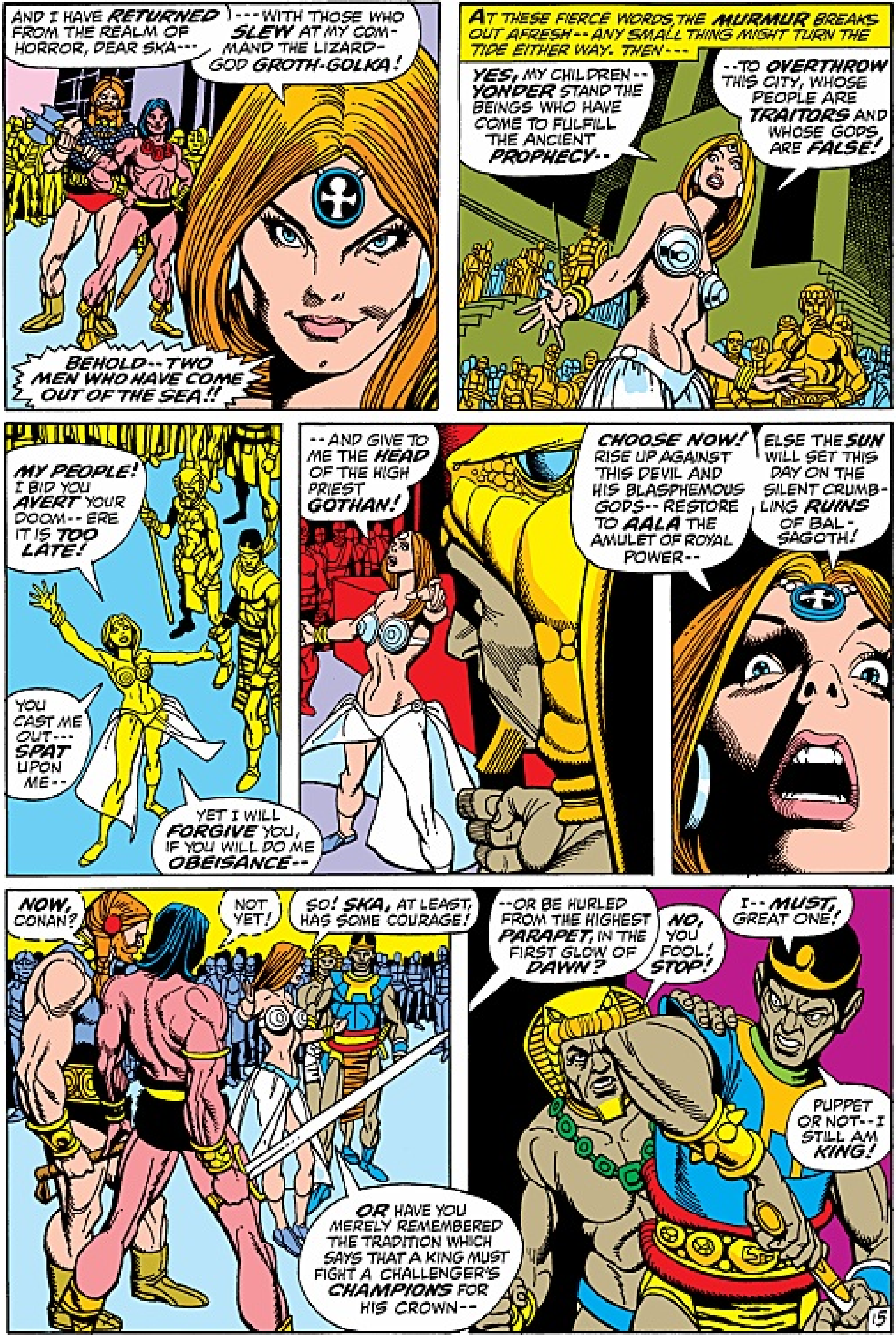

YOU'LL GET HOME, MAN, IF I HAVE TO CARRY YOU THERE MYSELF.
NOT LIKELY. BESIDES, IF YOU'D NOT WEAKENED HIS NECK, I'D NEVER HAVE CRACKED IT.
STILL, WHAT IN--?
YOU! WHO ARE YOU MEN? WHENCE COME YOU?
WHAT DO YOU ON THE ISLE OF THE GODS?
I'VE SEEN NO GODS, WENCH!
JUST A DEVIL-BEAST SPAWNED IN HELL---
AND---
--A GIRL--- OF PASSING BEAUTY.
YOU'LL MAKE A POET YET, CIMMERIAN. SHE IS A COMELY THING.
YOU SPEAK WITH THE SAME VANIR ACCENT AS HE!
UNHAND ME, YOU GREAT VANIR OX!
WHO ARE YOU -- AND WHAT LAND IS THIS?
BAL-SAGOTH! THE OLDEST LAND IN ALL THE WORLD!
HYRKANIA--- KHITAI---EVEN SUNKEN ATLANTIS ---ALL ARE AS INFANTS BESIDE IT.
AND I AM KYRIE, DAUGHTER OF RANE, CALLED THE REAVER.
RANE? I RAN WITH HIS BAND IN THE NORTH WHEN I WAS YOUNG.
HOW CAME HE---AND YOU---HERE?
LIKE SO---
"YEARS PAST, HE'D HARRIED ALL THE LANDS HE KNEW---
"THUS, WITH ME IN TOW, HE JOURNEYED EAST---BECAME A PIRATE AS WELL---
"YET, HE PROVED NO MORE A MATCH FOR THE WHITE MISTS THAN MANY ANOTHER!
"A STORM WAS OUR UNDOING, AS YOURS---AND A WHIM OF THE GODS CAST ME ALONE ASHORE.
"THEIR SEA-GODDESS AALA HAS TRESSES SCARLET AS MY OWN--- SO THEY THOUGHT I WAS SHE---

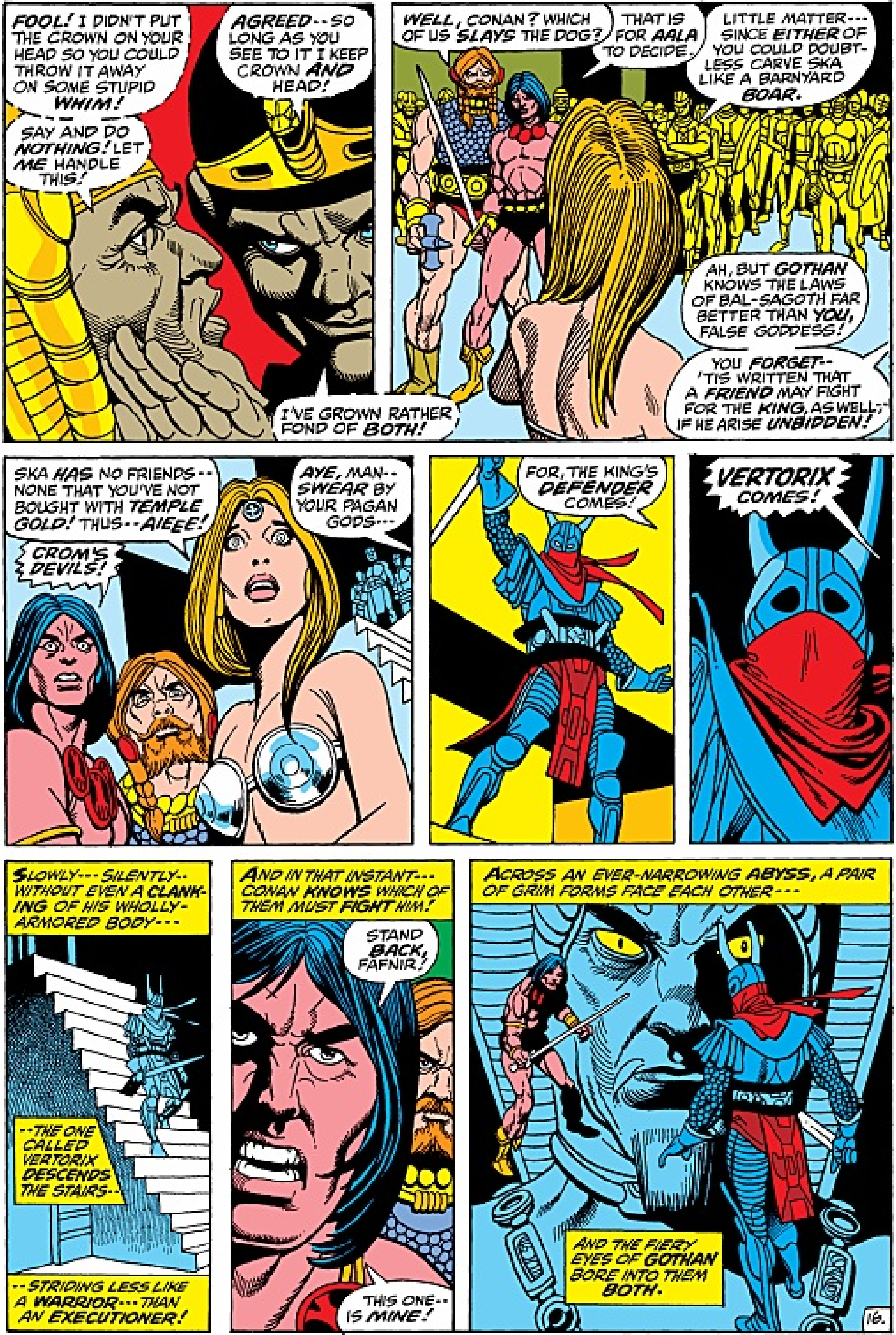

"THEY PUT ME IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE REST OF THEIR CURIOUS GODS---
"---AND DID REVERENCE TO ME!
"THOUGH I WAS SCARCELY MORE THAN A CHILD THEN, I SOON LEARNED THEIR TONGUE--- HOW TO USE THEIR CHILDISH BELIEFS---!
"OLD GOTHAN, THOUGH---THE HIGH PRIEST--HE WAS WISER THAN HIS PEOPLE.
"HE KNEW I WAS NO GODDESS---BUT A WOMAN, MERELY---
"AND WHEN THE TIME WAS RIPE---
"HE STIRRED THE PRIESTS AND THEIR WARRIORS AGAINST ME!
"THOSE FAITHFUL TO ME WERE BASELY SLAUGHTERED---
"BUT SOME STILL THOUGHT ME A GODDESS, SO GOTHAN DARED NOT SLAY ME.
"THEY ROWED ME HERE---
"---ACROSS THE LAGOON WHICH SPLITS THIS ISLE IN TWO--
"---AND LEFT ME TO MY FATE!"
AND THAT FATE WAS--- THIS MONSTER?!
GROTH-GOLKA--- LAST OF THE ONCE-DREADED LIZARD-GODS!
LET US SPEAK -- OF THE FUTURE!
BUT NOW, LET THE PAST BE AS DEAD AS HE!
COME WITH ME--- AND HELP ME WIN BACK MY KINGDOM!
DO SO-- AND WILL HEAP HONORS ON YOU!
GARMENTS--- PALACES--- FAIREST MAIDENS SHALL ALL BE YOURS.
MY BELLY IS EMPTY. LEAD ME TO FOOD, AND I'LL HEW MY WAY TO IT THRU A HORDE OF PRIESTS AND WARRIORS!
AND YOU, FAFNIR?
YOU STOLE THE WORDS FROM MY MOUTH, LITTLE MAN!
BUT THE THREE OF US--- AGAINST A CITY?

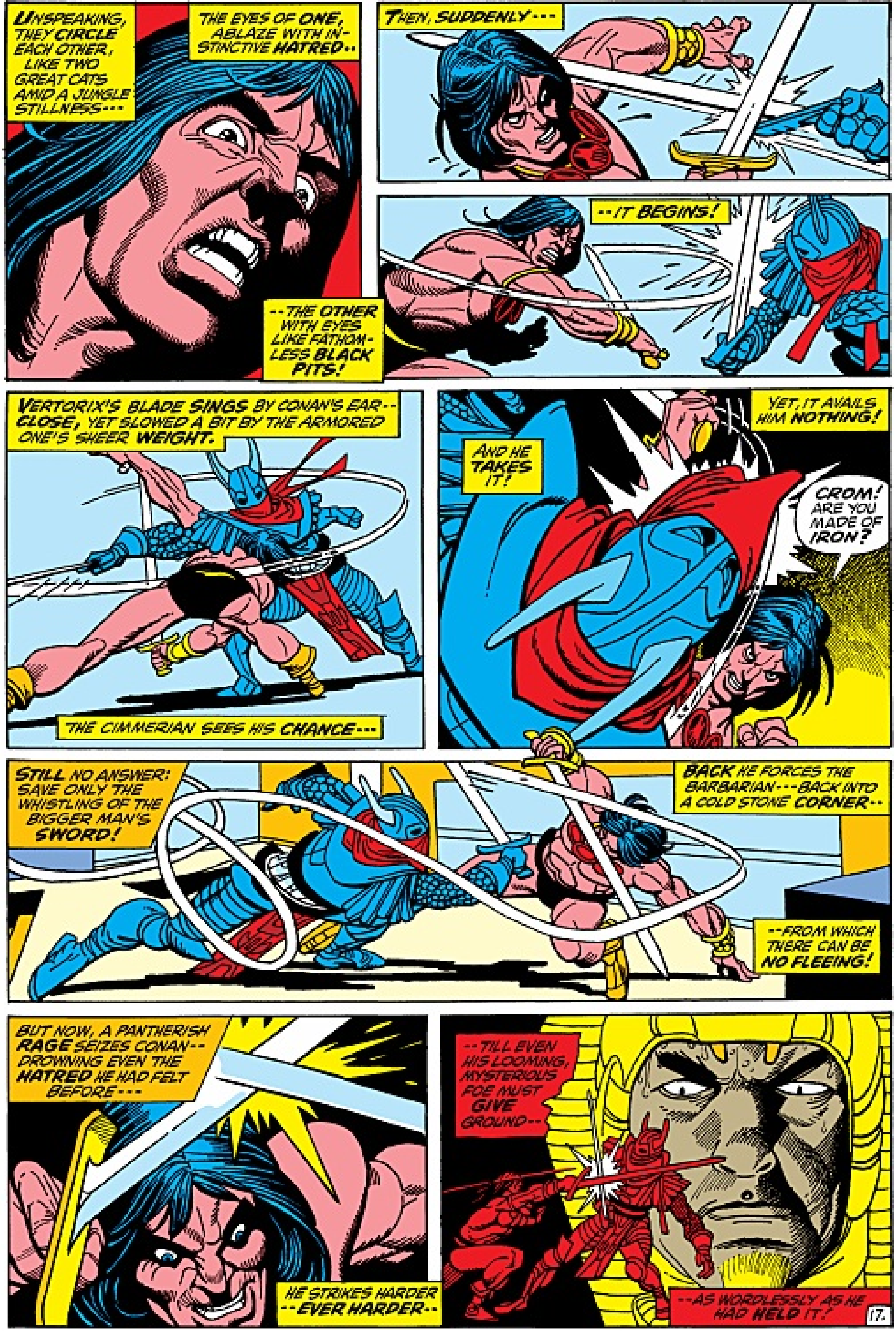

THERE IS A **LEGEND** WHICH SAYS THAT WHEN **TWO MEN** COME OUT OF THE SEA--- **BAL-SAGOTH WILL FALL!**
AND YOU THINK THAT, **FEARING** THAT LEGEND, ITS PEOPLE WILL RUSH HEADLONG INTO YOUR **ARMS,** EH?
WELL, WE'RE **HUNGRY,** AS I SAID--
---SO **LEAD ON!**
HAH! NOW LET GOTHAN AND HIS PUPPET-KING **TREMBLE!**
I'LL HURL THEM BOTH FROM THE HIGHEST **BATTLEMENT,** THOUGH THE BELLOWING OF THEIR DEMONS SHAKE THE **EARTH** ITSELF!
FOLLOW ME--- FOR I WOULD SLEEP IN MY OWN **PALACE** TONIGHT!
NOW, THE THREE PASS THRU THE **SHADOWS** OF AN ENCROACHING FOREST---
BUT THE GREAT **BEASTS** THERE, SURVIVORS OF ANOTHER AGE, DO NOT ATTACK.
CONAN---DO YOU **BELIEVE** THOSE PROMISES OF GIRLS AND RICHES?
THEY SLIDE FROM MY MIND, LEAVING NO **TRACK.** YET---
WAIT!
BEHOLD, YOU MEN, WHO CAME FROM OUT THE WHITE-MIST SEA---
THERE--ACROSS THE BROAD BLUE **LAGOON** BEFORE US---
THE PROUD RAMPARTS OF BAL-SAGOTH!
IS THAT NOT A PRIZE WORTH **FIGHTING** FOR?
CROM!
YET, EVEN AS THE THREE GAZE IN **AWE** UPON THE SKY-THRUSTING TOWERS---
--**THEY** ARE WATCHED, IN THEIR TURN!

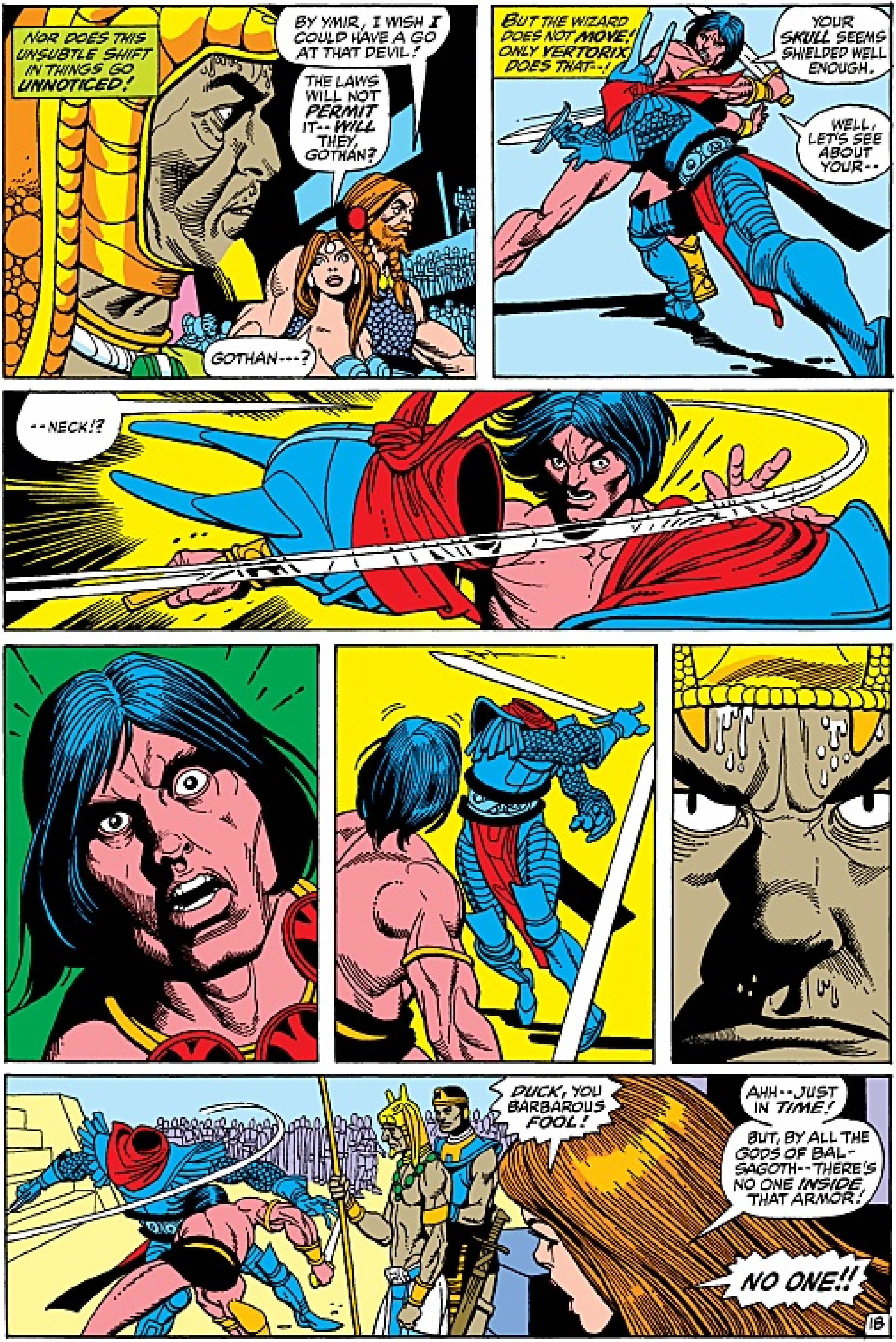

WHO'S **THAT**, RUNNING OFF?
A **SLAVE**, LEFT TO TELL GOTHAN IF I SURVIVED THE **NIGHT**.
SWIFT, NOW-- MAKE A **RAFT!** WE COULD NEVER **SWIM** THESE SHARK-HAUNTED WATERS.
--WELL? PUT YOUR **BACKS** INTO IT, BOTH OF YOU!
DO YOU WANT **GOTHAN** TO ARRIVE, AND **DISPUTE** OUR PASSAGE?
BY YMIR, CONAN--- THAT WENCH WOULD KNOW HER **PLACE**, IF SHE WERE BACK IN VANAHEIM, WHERE SHE **BELONGS**.
THERE, A WOMAN SPEAKS ONLY **ONCE A NIGHT**--
--AND THE NIGHTS ARE **SIX MONTHS LONG!**
TELL ME, GIRL-- WHY DIDN'T YOU **KILL** GOTHAN, WHEN YOU HAD THE **CHANCE**?
THE PEOPLE FEAR **HIM** AS A GOD-- AS THEY DID **ME**.
THEY'D HAVE RISEN **AGAINST** ME, IF I'D SLAIN HIM.
HMMM-- YOUR CITY HAS **MANY** GODS.
AYE-- BUT THE GREATEST OF ALL IS **GOL-GORTH, THE GOD OF DARKNESS**.
ONCE, I **FORBADE** THE PEOPLE TO WORSHIP HIS IMAGE--- EVEN ORDERED MY MEN TO **DESTROY** IT.
THEIR BLOWS ONLY SHATTERED THEIR **HAMMERS**.
SO I **BOLTED THE DOORS** OF HIS TEMPLE -- BUT NOW I'M SURE GOTHAN HAS **OPENED** THEM AGAIN---
---AND SLAIN MY **OWN** PRIESTS ON ITS BLACK ALTARS!
PERHAPS--- WE'VE COME HERE TOO **HASTILY**, AT THAT!
AFTER ALL --- **THREE** AGAINST A **NATION**--!
A NATION OF **FOOLS**-- LIKE **ALL** NATIONS!
SMITE THE GATE-- THEN **STEP BACK**--
--LEST SOMETHING **FALL** ON YOU!
NO NEED. ALREADY, THE PORTALS SWING **INWARD**--!

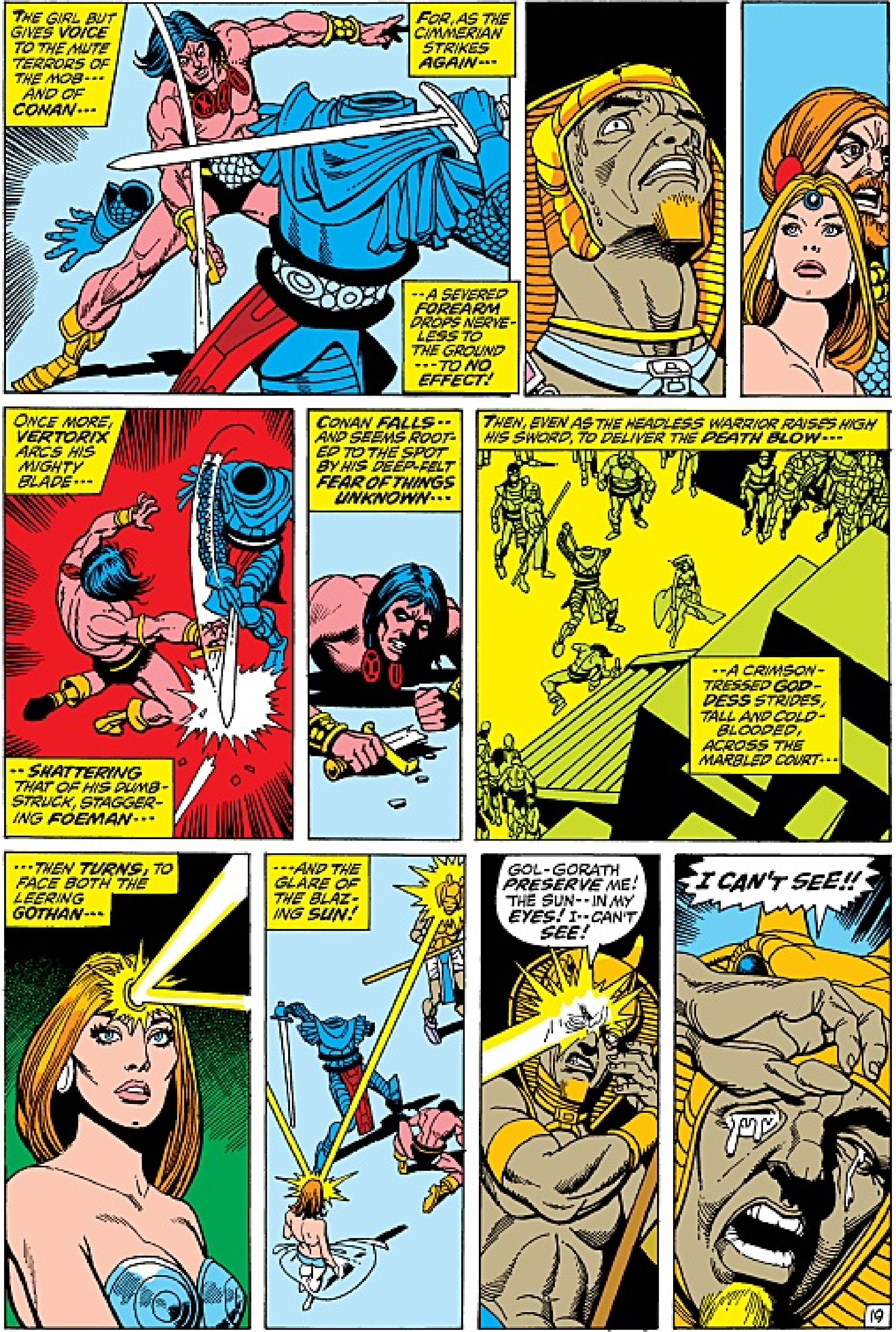

SO THEY DO---
AND THEN, THE GIRL KYRIE BECOMES ONCE MORE THE GODDESS AALA---AND SPEAKS IN A VOICE MORE LOUD THAN ONE COULD HAVE EXPECTED---
WELL, PEOPLE OF BAL-SAGOTH--?
--WHAT WORDS HAVE YOU FOR THE GODDESS YOU MOCKED AND REVILED??
BUT, IF THERE IS AN ANSWER AMONG THE FURTIVE MURMURS, CONAN DOES NOT HEAR IT. FOR, HIS GAZE IS RIVETED UPON A MAN--VERY OLD, VERY LEAN--AND HIS SKIN CRAWLS, AS IF HE STARES INTO THE UNBLINKING EYES OF A GREAT SERPENT.
AND, IN THAT INSTANT, HE KNOWS THAT HE LOOKS UPON---
GOTHAN--PRIEST OF THE DARK GOD!
NOW DO WE STRIKE, CONAN?
IT IS HER MOVE--AND BY CROM, SHE PLAYS THE GODDESS WELL!
SO, GOTHAN--I SEE YOU WEAR THE JADE AMULET OF KINGSHIP.
YOU MIGHT AT LEAST HAVE LET YOUR PUPPET KING WEAR IT FOR A WHILE!
AND AS FOR YOU, SKA--JACKAL THAT YOU ARE---
YOU DARE COME BACK HERE, WOMAN?
YOU WERE DOOMED BY DECREE--PLACED BEYOND THE LAGOON--!

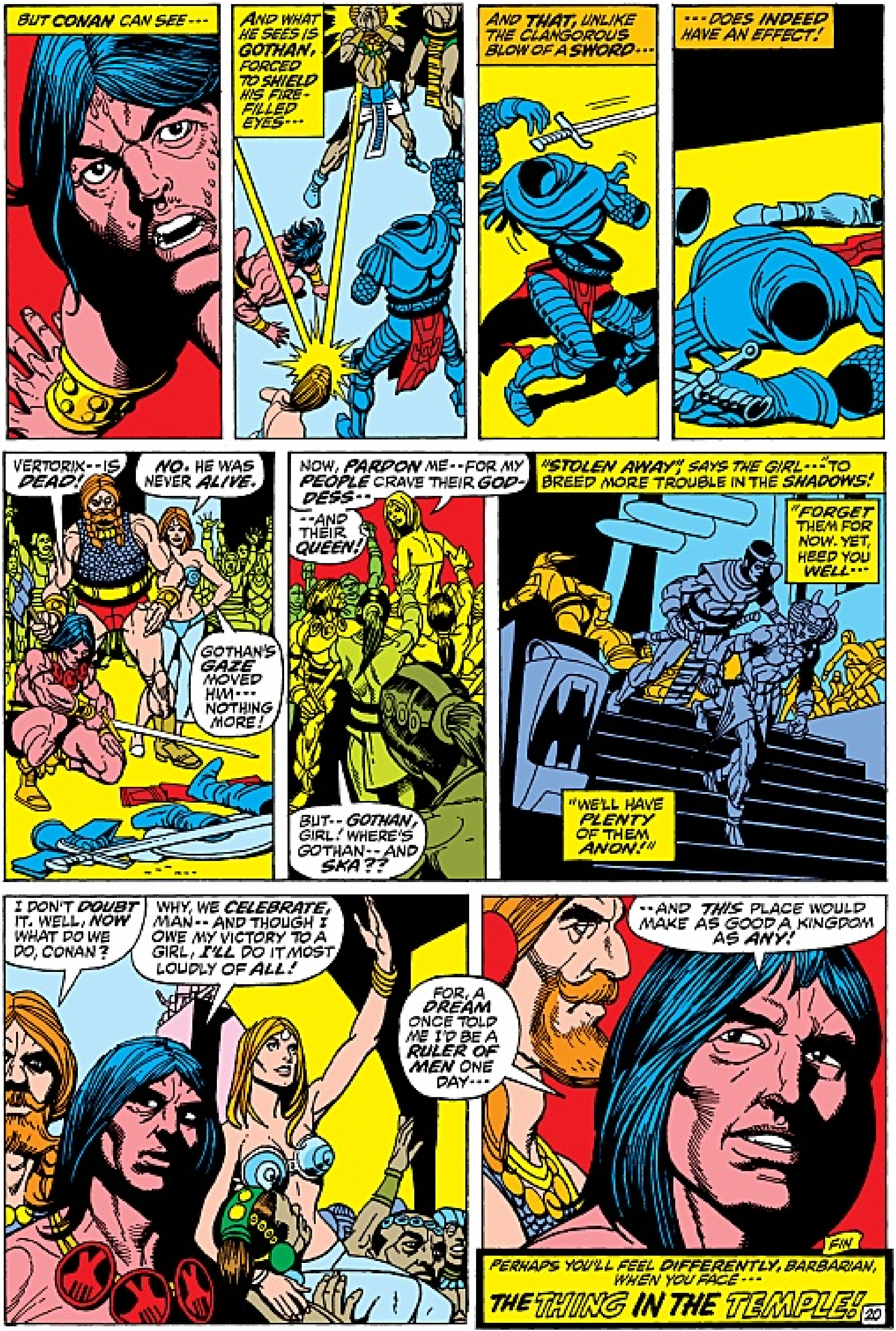

AND I HAVE RETURNED FROM THE REALM OF HORROR, DEAR SKA---
---WITH THOSE WHO SLEW AT MY COMMAND THE LIZARD-GOD GROTH-GOLKA!
BEHOLD--TWO MEN WHO HAVE COME OUT OF THE SEA!!
AT THESE FIERCE WORDS, THE MURMUR BREAKS OUT AFRESH-- ANY SMALL THING MIGHT TURN THE TIDE EITHER WAY. THEN---
YES, MY CHILDREN-- YONDER STAND THE BEINGS WHO HAVE COME TO FULFILL THE ANCIENT PROPHECY--
--TO OVERTHROW THIS CITY, WHOSE PEOPLE ARE TRAITORS AND WHOSE GODS ARE FALSE!
MY PEOPLE! I BID YOU AVERT YOUR DOOM-- ERE IT IS TOO LATE!
YOU CAST ME OUT--- SPAT UPON ME--
YET I WILL FORGIVE YOU, IF YOU WILL DO ME OBEISANCE--
--AND GIVE TO ME THE HEAD OF THE HIGH PRIEST GOTHAN!
CHOOSE NOW! RISE UP AGAINST THIS DEVIL AND HIS BLASPHEMOUS GODS-- RESTORE TO AALA THE AMULET OF ROYAL POWER--
ELSE THE SUN WILL SET THIS DAY ON THE SILENT CRUMBLING RUINS OF BAL-SAGOTH!
NOW, CONAN?
NOT YET!
SO! SKA, AT LEAST, HAS SOME COURAGE!
OR HAVE YOU MERELY REMEMBERED THE TRADITION WHICH SAYS THAT A KING MUST FIGHT A CHALLENGER'S CHAMPIONS FOR HIS CROWN--
--OR BE HURLED FROM THE HIGHEST PARAPET, IN THE FIRST GLOW OF DAWN?
NO, YOU FOOL! STOP!
I-- MUST, GREAT ONE!
PUPPET OR NOT-- I STILL AM KING!

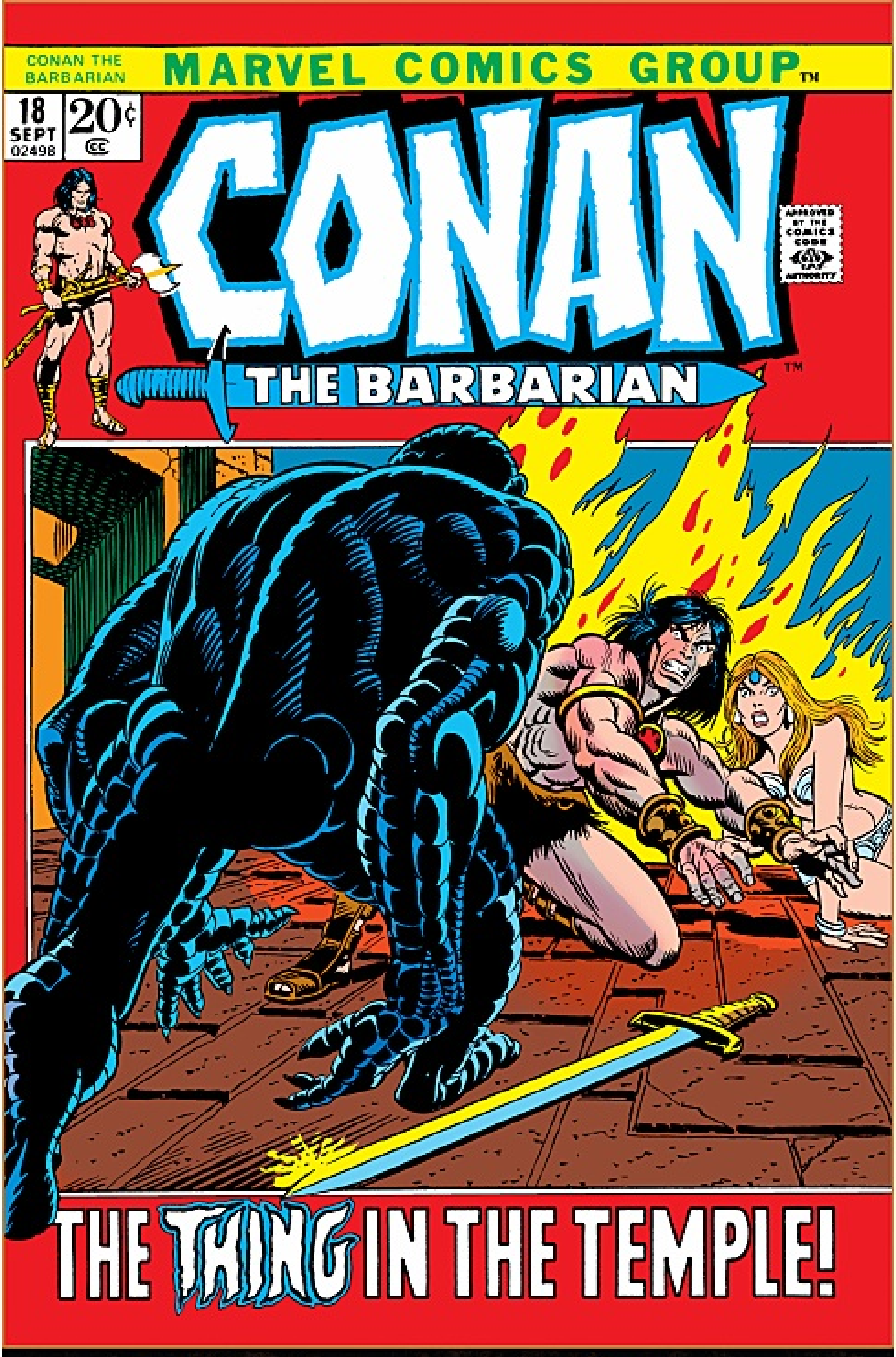

FOOL! I DIDN'T PUT THE CROWN ON YOUR HEAD SO YOU COULD THROW IT AWAY ON SOME STUPID WHIM!
SAY AND DO NOTHING! LET ME HANDLE THIS!
AGREED--SO LONG AS YOU SEE TO IT I KEEP CROWN AND HEAD!
I'VE GROWN RATHER FOND OF BOTH!
WELL, CONAN? WHICH OF US SLAYS THE DOG?
THAT IS FOR AALA TO DECIDE.
LITTLE MATTER--- SINCE EITHER OF YOU COULD DOUBTLESS CARVE SKA LIKE A BARNYARD BOAR.
AH, BUT GOTHAN KNOWS THE LAWS OF BAL-SAGOTH FAR BETTER THAN YOU, FALSE GODDESS!
YOU FORGET-- 'TIS WRITTEN THAT A FRIEND MAY FIGHT FOR THE KING, AS WELL-- IF HE ARISE UNBIDDEN!
SKA HAS NO FRIENDS-- NONE THAT YOU'VE NOT BOUGHT WITH TEMPLE GOLD! THUS--AIEEE!
CROM'S DEVILS!
AYE, MAN-- SWEAR BY YOUR PAGAN GODS---
FOR, THE KING'S DEFENDER COMES!
VERTORIX COMES!
SLOWLY--- SILENTLY-- WITHOUT EVEN A CLANKING OF HIS WHOLLY-ARMORED BODY---
--THE ONE CALLED VERTORIX DESCENDS THE STAIRS--
--STRIDING LESS LIKE A WARRIOR--- THAN AN EXECUTIONER!
AND IN THAT INSTANT--- CONAN KNOWS WHICH OF THEM MUST FIGHT HIM!
STAND BACK, FAFNIR!
THIS ONE-- IS MINE!
ACROSS AN EVER-NARROWING ABYSS, A PAIR OF GRIM FORMS FACE EACH OTHER---
AND THE FIERY EYES OF GOTHAN BORE INTO THEM BOTH.


UNSPEAKING, THEY CIRCLE EACH OTHER, LIKE TWO GREAT CATS AMID A JUNGLE STILLNESS---
THE EYES OF ONE, ABLAZE WITH INSTINCTIVE HATRED--
--THE OTHER WITH EYES LIKE FATHOMLESS BLACK PITS!
THEN, SUDDENLY---
--IT BEGINS!
VERTORIX'S BLADE SINGS BY CONAN'S EAR--CLOSE, YET SLOWED A BIT BY THE ARMORED ONE'S SHEER WEIGHT.
THE CIMMERIAN SEES HIS CHANCE---
AND HE TAKES IT!
YET, IT AVAILS HIM NOTHING!
CROM! ARE YOU MADE OF IRON?
STILL NO ANSWER: SAVE ONLY THE WHISTLING OF THE BIGGER MAN'S SWORD!
BACK HE FORCES THE BARBARIAN---BACK INTO A COLD STONE CORNER--
--FROM WHICH THERE CAN BE NO FLEEING!
BUT NOW, A PANTHERISH RAGE SEIZES CONAN--DROWNING EVEN THE HATRED HE HAD FELT BEFORE---
HE STRIKES HARDER --EVER HARDER--
--TILL EVEN HIS LOOMING, MYSTERIOUS FOE MUST GIVE GROUND--
--AS WORDLESSLY AS HE HAD HELD IT!


NOR DOES THIS UNSUBTLE SHIFT IN THINGS GO UNNOTICED!
BY YMIR, I WISH I COULD HAVE A GO AT THAT DEVIL!
THE LAWS WILL NOT PERMIT IT-- WILL THEY, GOTHAN?
GOTHAN---?
BUT THE WIZARD DOES NOT MOVE! ONLY VERTORIX DOES THAT--!
YOUR SKULL SEEMS SHIELDED WELL ENOUGH.
WELL, LET'S SEE ABOUT YOUR--
--NECK!?
DUCK, YOU BARBAROUS FOOL!
AHH--JUST IN TIME!
BUT, BY ALL THE GODS OF BAL-SAGOTH--THERE'S NO ONE INSIDE THAT ARMOR!
NO ONE!!


THE GIRL BUT GIVES VOICE TO THE MUTE TERRORS OF THE MOB--- AND OF CONAN---
FOR, AS THE CIMMERIAN STRIKES AGAIN---
--A SEVERED FOREARM DROPS NERVELESS TO THE GROUND ---TO NO EFFECT!
ONCE MORE, VERTORIX ARCS HIS MIGHTY BLADE---
--SHATTERING THAT OF HIS DUMBSTRUCK, STAGGERING FOEMAN---
CONAN FALLS-- AND SEEMS ROOTED TO THE SPOT BY HIS DEEP-FELT FEAR OF THINGS UNKNOWN---
THEN, EVEN AS THE HEADLESS WARRIOR RAISES HIGH HIS SWORD, TO DELIVER THE DEATH BLOW---
--A CRIMSON-TRESSED GODDESS STRIDES, TALL AND COLD-BLOODED, ACROSS THE MARBLED COURT---
---THEN TURNS, TO FACE BOTH THE LEERING GOTHAN---
---AND THE GLARE OF THE BLAZING SUN!
GOL-GORATH PRESERVE ME! THE SUN--IN MY EYES! I--CAN'T SEE!
I CAN'T SEE!!


BUT CONAN CAN SEE---
AND WHAT HE SEES IS GOTHAN, FORCED TO SHIELD HIS FIRE-FILLED EYES---
AND THAT, UNLIKE THE CLANGOROUS BLOW OF A SWORD---
---DOES INDEED HAVE AN EFFECT!
VERTORIX--IS DEAD!
NO. HE WAS NEVER ALIVE.
GOTHAN'S GAZE MOVED HIM--- NOTHING MORE!
NOW, PARDON ME--FOR MY PEOPLE CRAVE THEIR GODDESS--
--AND THEIR QUEEN!
BUT--GOTHAN, GIRL! WHERE'S GOTHAN--AND SKA??
"STOLEN AWAY", SAYS THE GIRL---"TO BREED MORE TROUBLE IN THE SHADOWS!
"FORGET THEM FOR NOW. YET, HEED YOU WELL---
"WE'LL HAVE PLENTY OF THEM ANON!"
I DON'T DOUBT IT. WELL, NOW WHAT DO WE DO, CONAN?
WHY, WE CELEBRATE, MAN--AND THOUGH I OWE MY VICTORY TO A GIRL, I'LL DO IT MOST LOUDLY OF ALL!
FOR, A DREAM ONCE TOLD ME I'D BE A RULER OF MEN ONE DAY---
--AND THIS PLACE WOULD MAKE AS GOOD A KINGDOM AS ANY!
FIN
PERHAPS YOU'LL FEEL DIFFERENTLY, BARBARIAN, WHEN YOU FACE---
THE THING IN THE TEMPLE!
20


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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THE THING IN THE TEMPLE!

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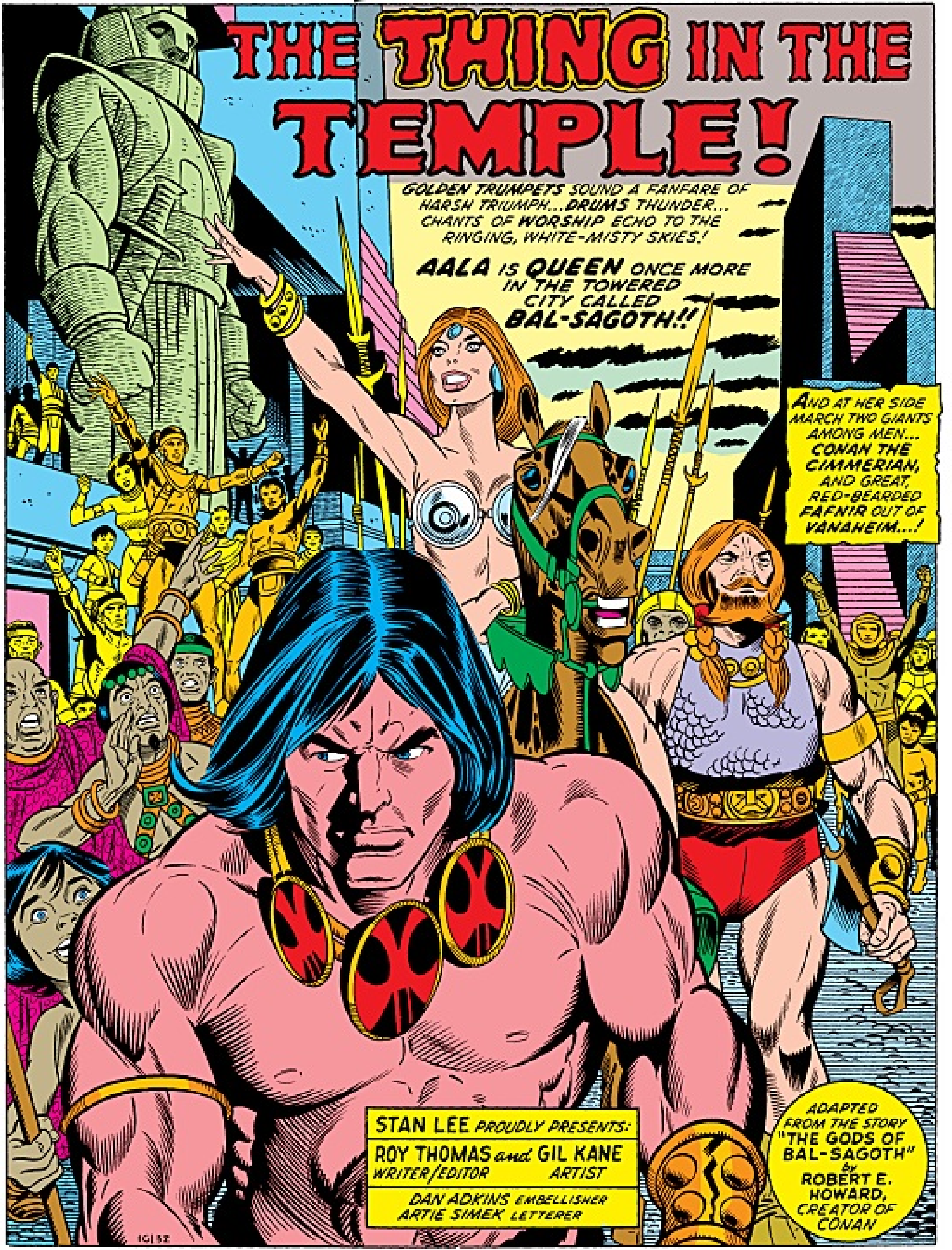
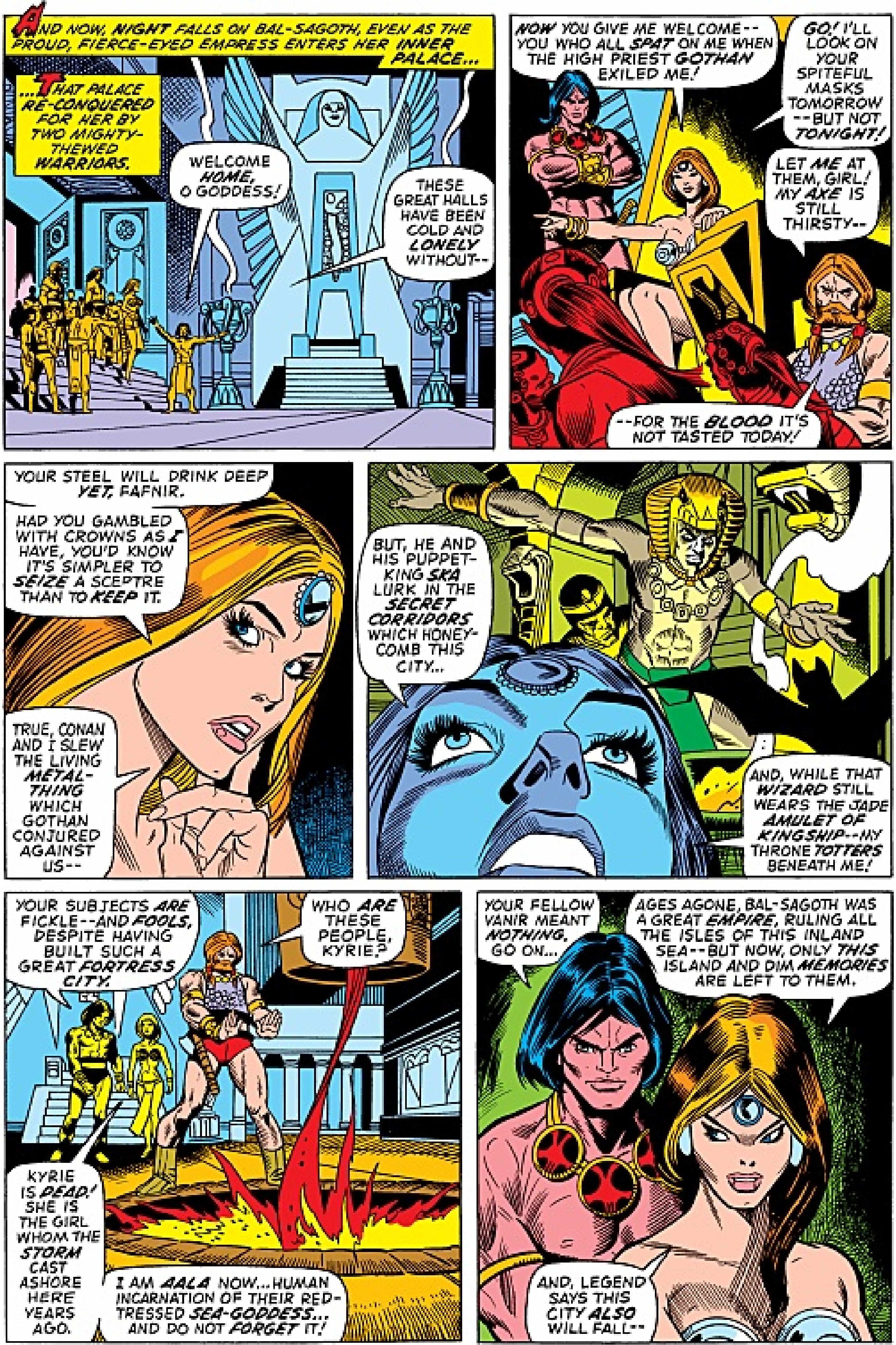
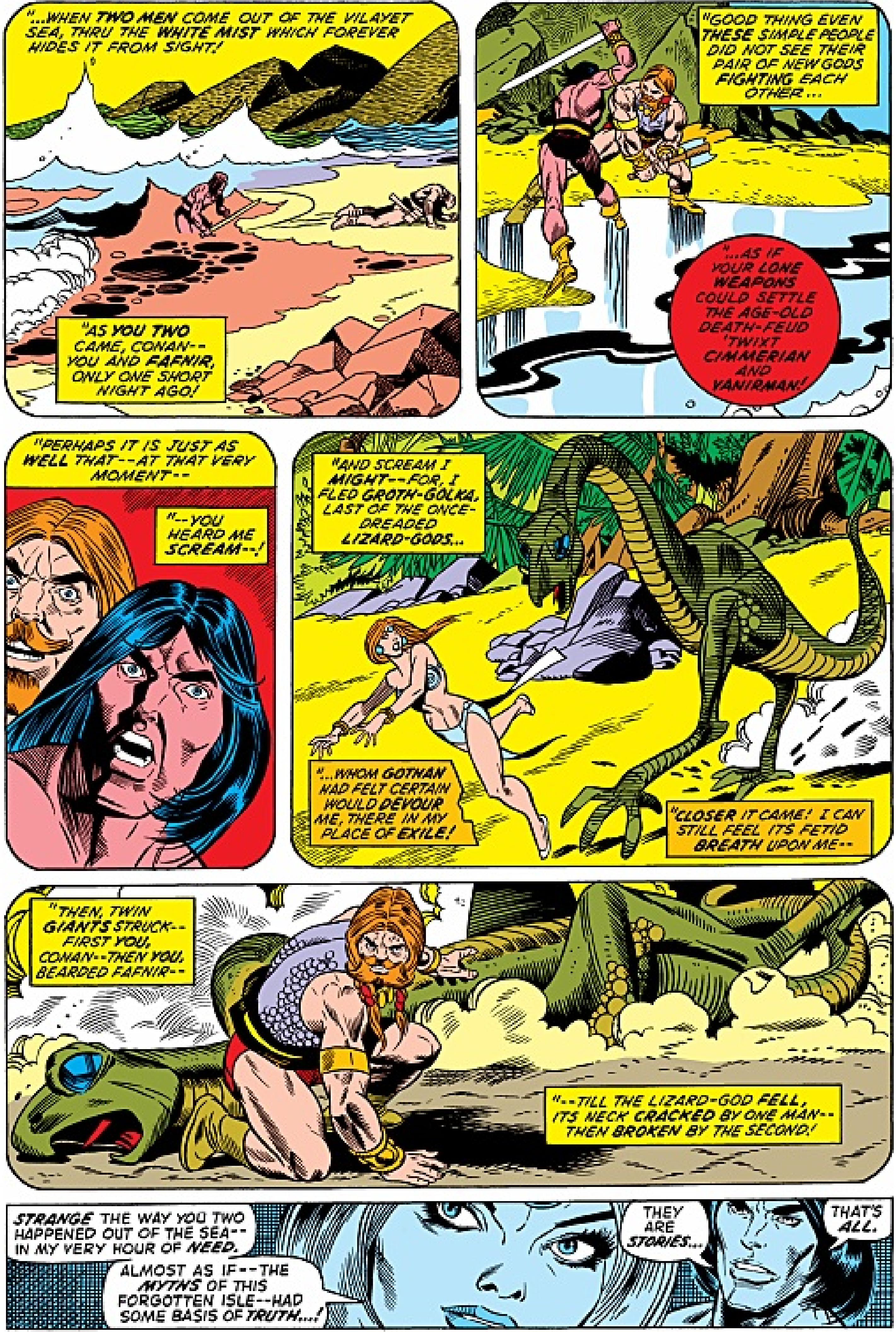
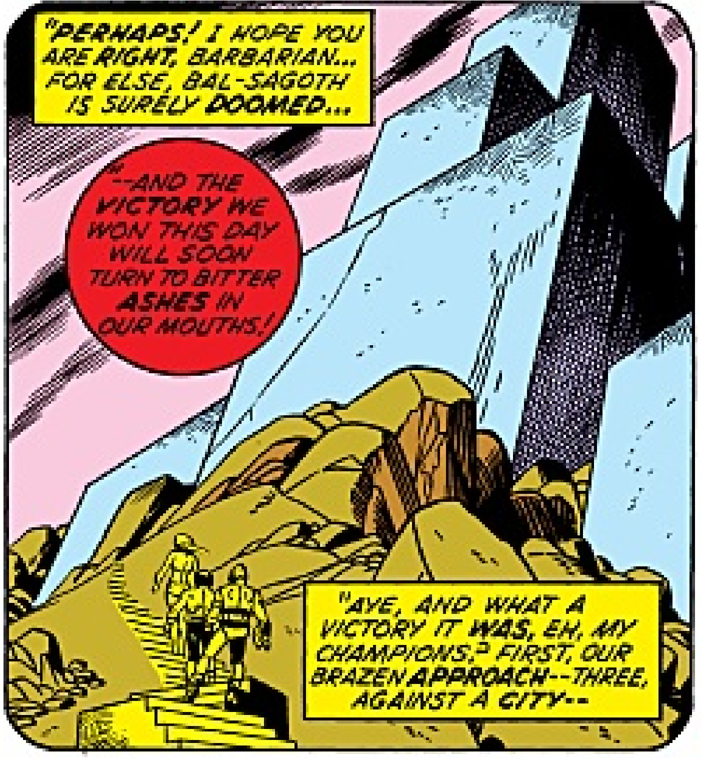
CONAN THE BARBARIAN™

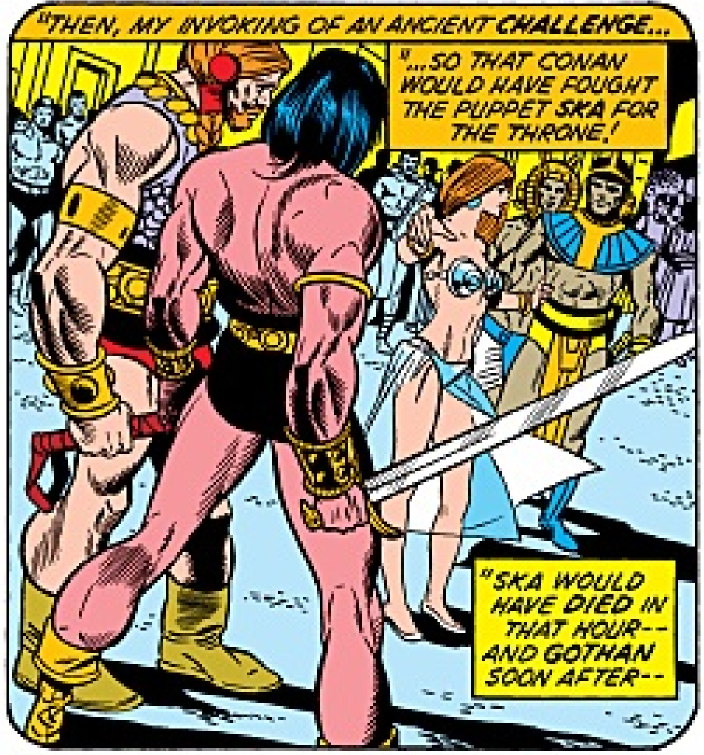
THE THING IN THE TEMPLE!

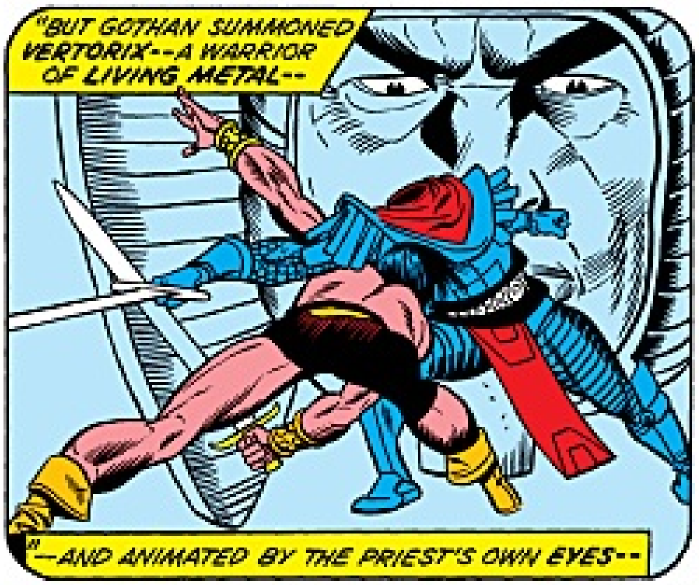

GOLDEN TRUMPETS SOUND A FANFARE OF HARSH TRIUMPH... DRUMS THUNDER... CHANTS OF WORSHIP ECHO TO THE RINGING, WHITE-MISTY SKIES!
AALA IS QUEEN ONCE MORE IN THE TOWERED CITY CALLED BAL-SAGOTH!!
AND AT HER SIDE MARCH TWO GIANTS AMONG MEN... CONAN THE CIMMERIAN, AND GREAT, RED-BEARDED FAFNIR OUT OF VANAHEIM...!
STAN LEE PROUDLY PRESENTS:
ROY THOMAS and GIL KANE
WRITER/EDITOR ARTIST
DAN ADKINS EMBELLISHER
ARTIE SIMEK LETTERER
ADAPTED FROM THE STORY "THE GODS OF BAL-SAGOTH" by ROBERT E. HOWARD, CREATOR OF CONAN

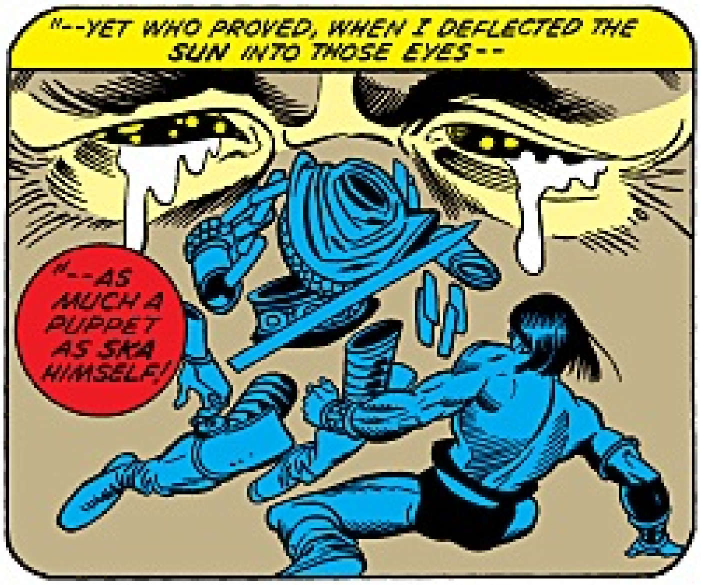

AND NOW, NIGHT FALLS ON BAL-SAGOTH, EVEN AS THE PROUD, FIERCE-EYED EMPRESS ENTERS HER INNER PALACE...
...THAT PALACE RE-CONQUERED FOR HER BY TWO MIGHTY-THEWED WARRIORS.
WELCOME HOME, O GODDESS!
THESE GREAT HALLS HAVE BEEN COLD AND LONELY WITHOUT--
NOW YOU GIVE ME WELCOME--YOU WHO ALL SPAT ON ME WHEN THE HIGH PRIEST GOTHAN EXILED ME!
GO! I'LL LOOK ON YOUR SPITEFUL MASKS TOMORROW --BUT NOT TONIGHT!
LET ME AT THEM, GIRL! MY AXE IS STILL THIRSTY--
--FOR THE BLOOD IT'S NOT TASTED TODAY!
YOUR STEEL WILL DRINK DEEP YET, FAFNIR.
HAD YOU GAMBLED WITH CROWNS AS I HAVE, YOU'D KNOW IT'S SIMPLER TO SEIZE A SCEPTRE THAN TO KEEP IT.
TRUE, CONAN AND I SLEW THE LIVING METAL-THING WHICH GOTHAN CONJURED AGAINST US--
BUT, HE AND HIS PUPPET-KING SKA LURK IN THE SECRET CORRIDORS WHICH HONEYCOMB THIS CITY...
AND, WHILE THAT WIZARD STILL WEARS THE JADE AMULET OF KINGSHIP--MY THRONE TOTTERS BENEATH ME!
YOUR SUBJECTS ARE FICKLE--AND FOOLS, DESPITE HAVING BUILT SUCH A GREAT FORTRESS CITY.
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE, KYRIE?
KYRIE IS DEAD! SHE IS THE GIRL WHOM THE STORM CAST ASHORE HERE YEARS AGO.
I AM AALA NOW...HUMAN INCARNATION OF THEIR RED-TRESSED SEA-GODDESS... AND DO NOT FORGET IT!
YOUR FELLOW VANIR MEANT NOTHING. GO ON...
AGES AGONE, BAL-SAGOTH WAS A GREAT EMPIRE, RULING ALL THE ISLES OF THIS INLAND SEA--BUT NOW, ONLY THIS ISLAND AND DIM MEMORIES ARE LEFT TO THEM.
AND, LEGEND SAYS THIS CITY ALSO WILL FALL--

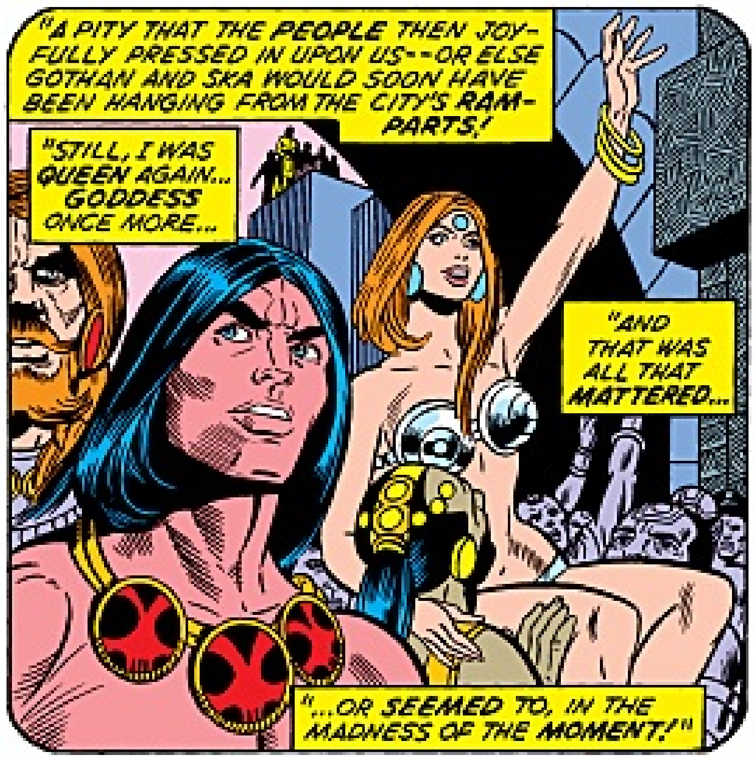

"...WHEN TWO MEN COME OUT OF THE VILAYET SEA, THRU THE WHITE MIST WHICH FOREVER HIDES IT FROM SIGHT!
"AS YOU TWO CAME, CONAN--YOU AND FAFNIR, ONLY ONE SHORT NIGHT AGO!
"GOOD THING EVEN THESE SIMPLE PEOPLE DID NOT SEE THEIR PAIR OF NEW GODS FIGHTING EACH OTHER...
"...AS IF YOUR LONE WEAPONS COULD SETTLE THE AGE-OLD DEATH-FEUD 'TWIXT CIMMERIAN AND VANIRMAN!
"PERHAPS IT IS JUST AS WELL THAT--AT THAT VERY MOMENT--
"--YOU HEARD ME SCREAM--!
"AND SCREAM I MIGHT--FOR, I FLED GROTH-GOLKA, LAST OF THE ONCE-DREADED LIZARD-GODS...
"...WHOM GOTHAN HAD FELT CERTAIN WOULD DEVOUR ME, THERE IN MY PLACE OF EXILE!
"CLOSER IT CAME! I CAN STILL FEEL ITS FETID BREATH UPON ME--
"THEN, TWIN GIANTS STRUCK--FIRST YOU, CONAN--THEN YOU, BEARDED FAFNIR--
"--TILL THE LIZARD-GOD FELL, ITS NECK CRACKED BY ONE MAN--THEN BROKEN BY THE SECOND!
STRANGE THE WAY YOU TWO HAPPENED OUT OF THE SEA--IN MY VERY HOUR OF NEED.
ALMOST AS IF--THE MYTHS OF THIS FORGOTTEN ISLE--HAD SOME BASIS OF TRUTH...!
THEY ARE STORIES...
THAT'S ALL.

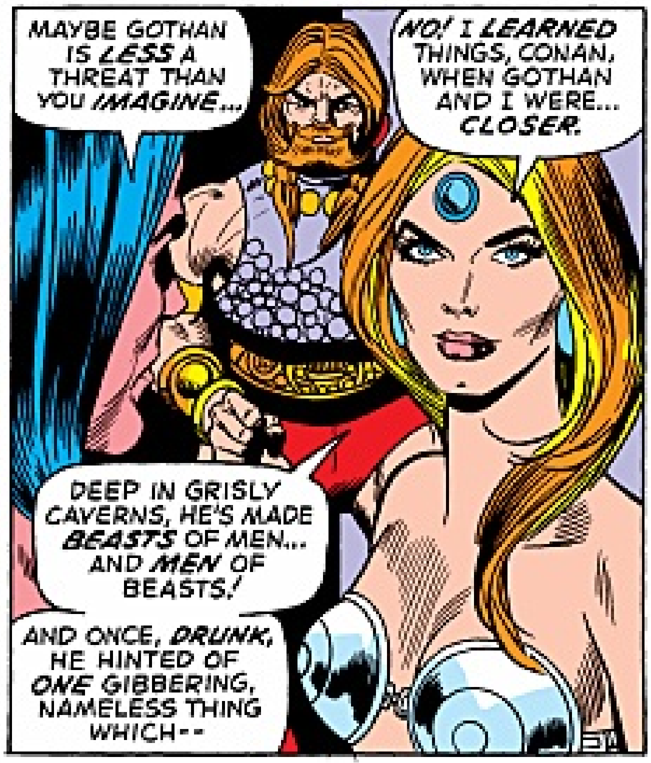

"PERHAPS! I HOPE YOU ARE RIGHT, BARBARIAN... FOR ELSE, BAL-SAGOTH IS SURELY DOOMED...
"--AND THE VICTORY WE WON THIS DAY WILL SOON TURN TO BITTER ASHES IN OUR MOUTHS!"
"AYE, AND WHAT A VICTORY IT WAS, EH, MY CHAMPIONS? FIRST, OUR BRAZEN APPROACH--THREE, AGAINST A CITY--

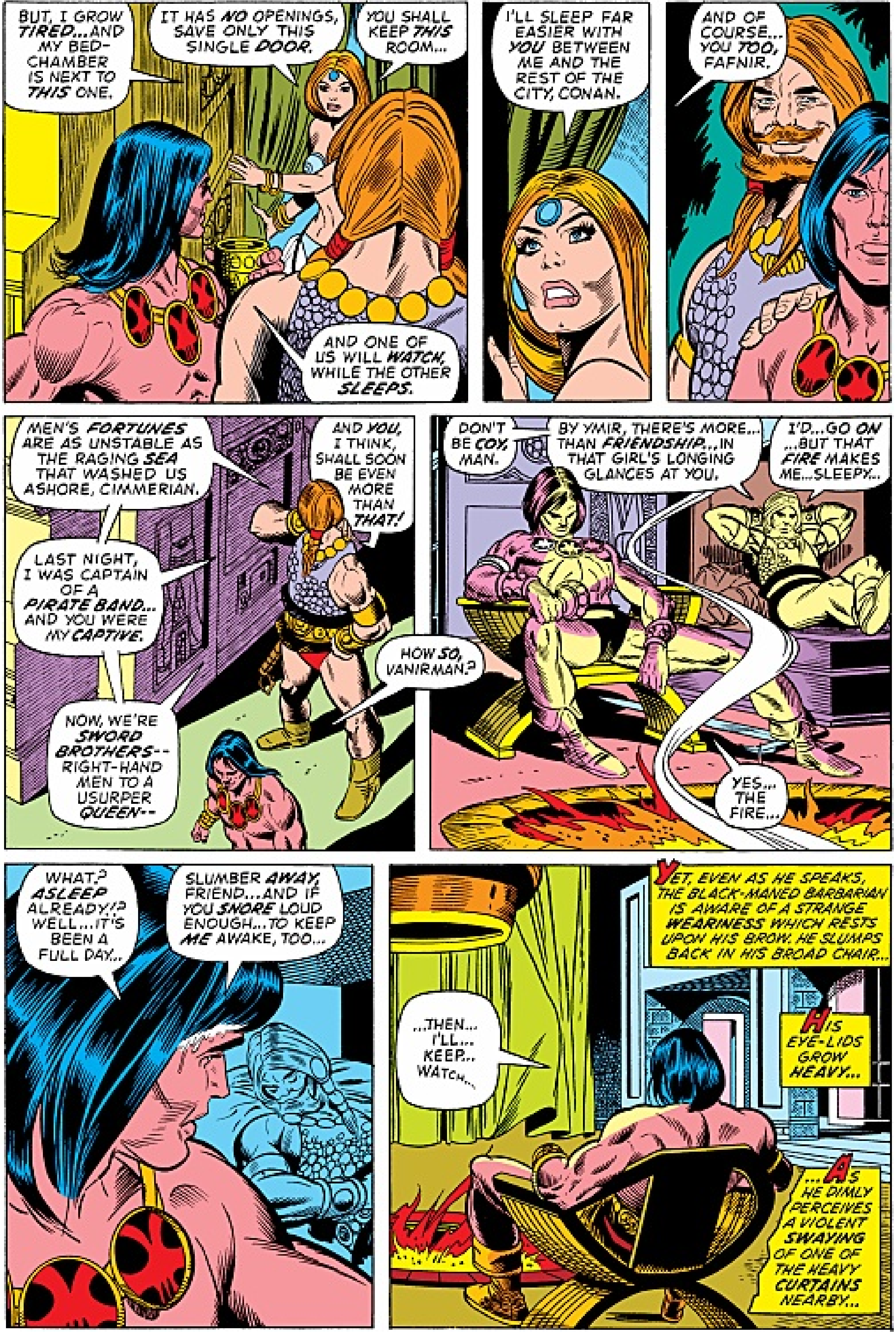

"THEN, MY INVOKING OF AN ANCIENT CHALLENGE...
"...SO THAT CONAN WOULD HAVE FOUGHT THE PUPPET SKA FOR THE THRONE!
"SKA WOULD HAVE DIED IN THAT HOUR--AND GOTHAN SOON AFTER--

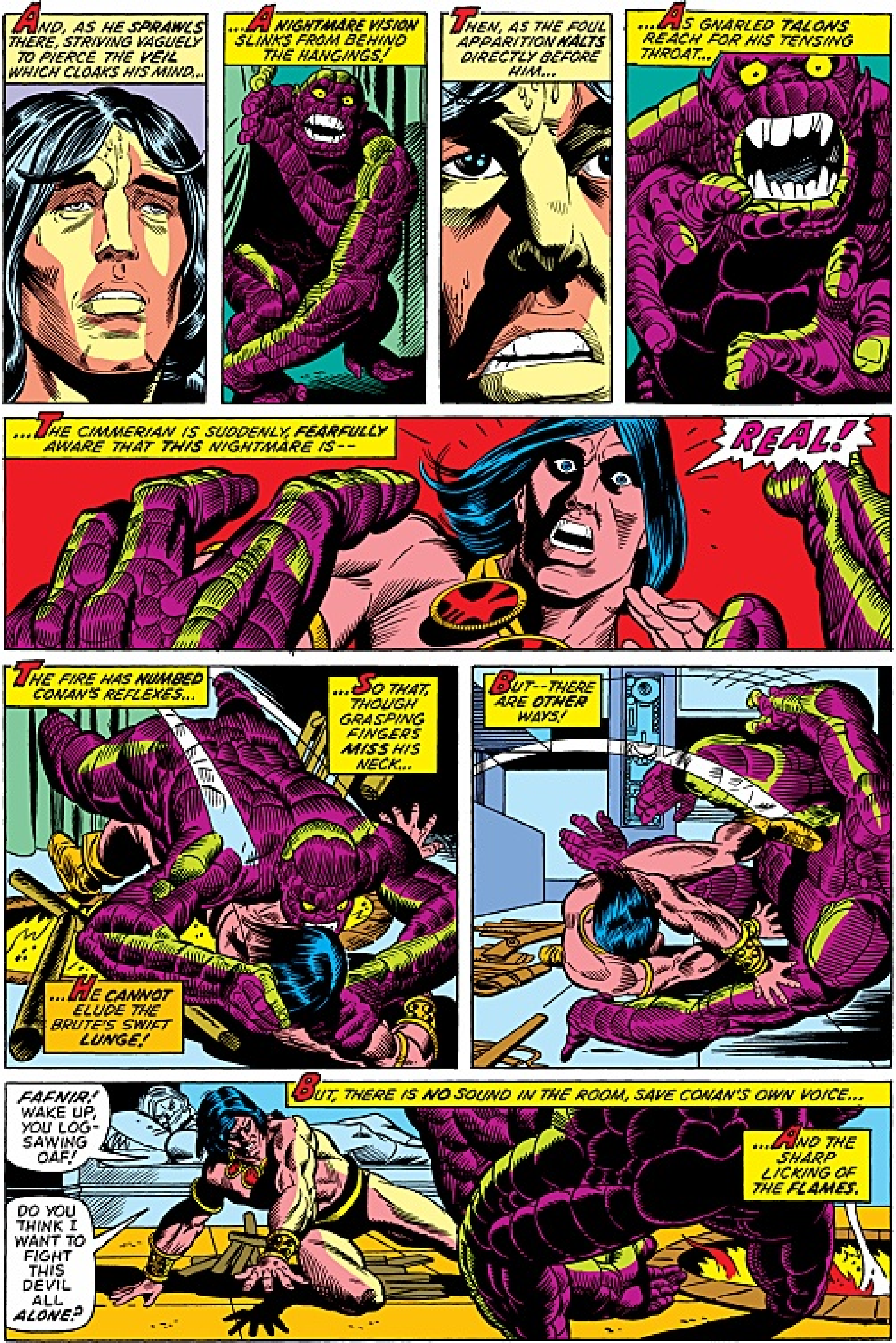

"BUT GOTHAN SUMMONED VERTORIX--A WARRIOR OF LIVING METAL--
"--AND ANIMATED BY THE PRIEST'S OWN EYES--

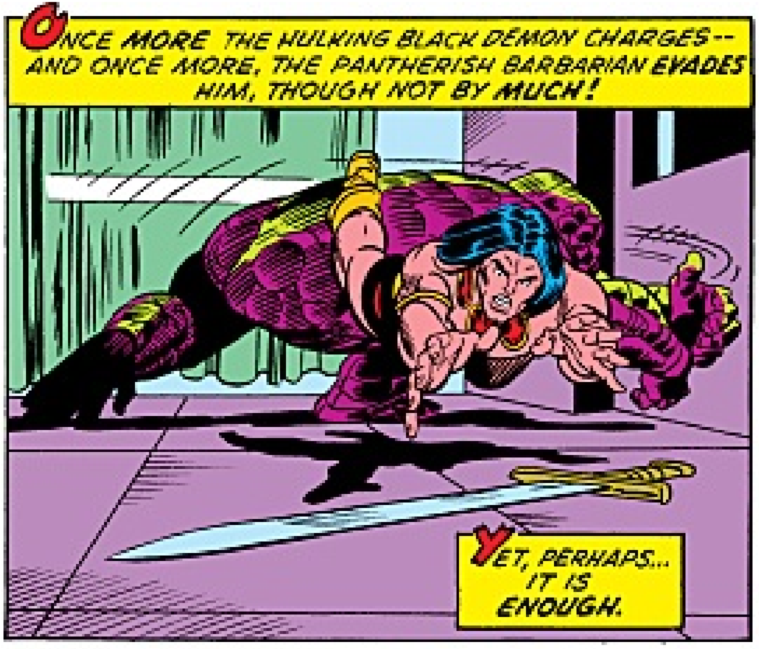

"--YET WHO PROVED, WHEN I DEFLECTED THE SUN INTO THOSE EYES--
"--AS MUCH A PUPPET AS SKA HIMSELF!

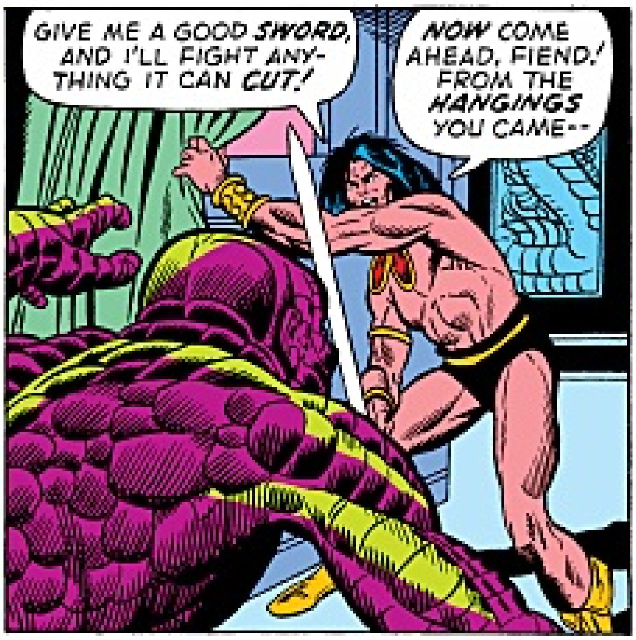

"A PITY THAT THE PEOPLE THEN JOYFULLY PRESSED IN UPON US--OR ELSE GOTHAN AND SKA WOULD SOON HAVE BEEN HANGING FROM THE CITY'S RAMPARTS!
"STILL, I WAS QUEEN AGAIN... GODDESS ONCE MORE...
"AND THAT WAS ALL THAT MATTERED...
"...OR SEEMED TO, IN THE MADNESS OF THE MOMENT!"

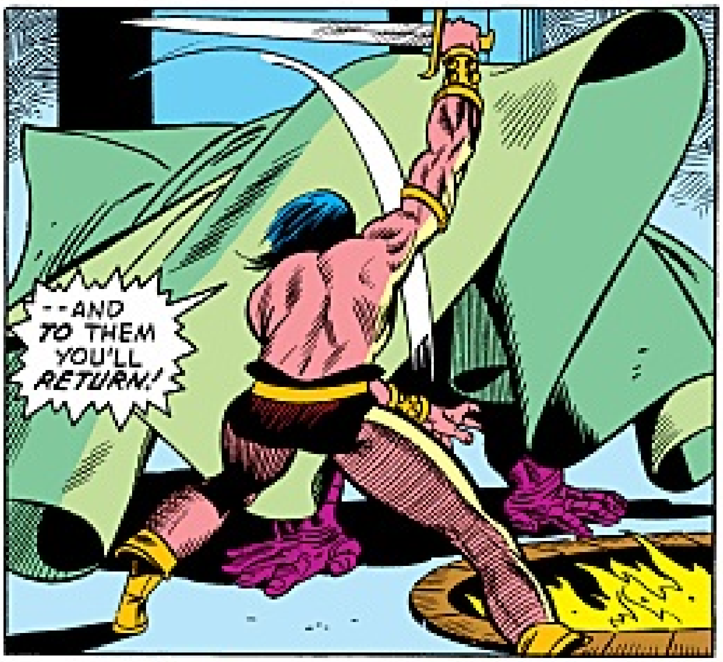

MAYBE GOTHAN IS LESS A THREAT THAN YOU IMAGINE...
NO! I LEARNED THINGS, CONAN, WHEN GOTHAN AND I WERE... CLOSER.
DEEP IN GRISLY CAVERNS, HE'S MADE BEASTS OF MEN... AND MEN OF BEASTS!
AND ONCE, DRUNK, HE HINTED OF ONE GIBBERING, NAMELESS THING WHICH--

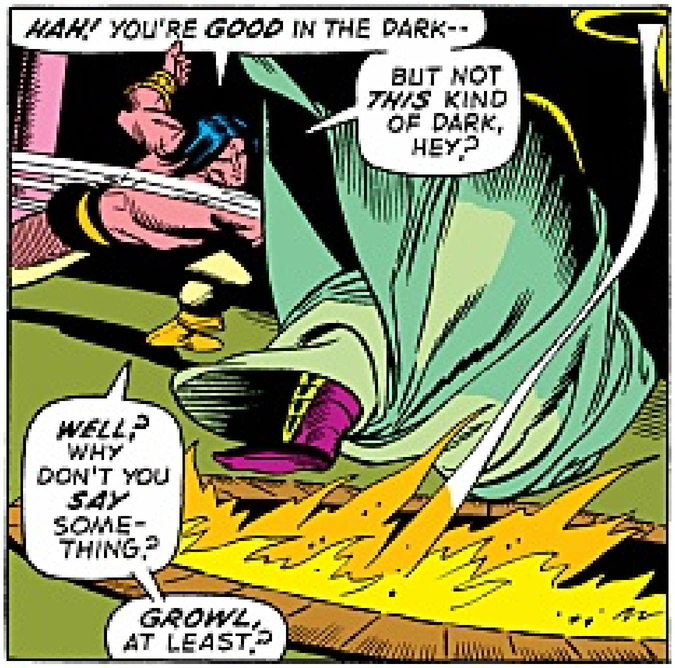

BUT, I GROW TIRED...AND MY BED-CHAMBER IS NEXT TO THIS ONE.
IT HAS NO OPENINGS, SAVE ONLY THIS SINGLE DOOR.
YOU SHALL KEEP THIS ROOM...
AND ONE OF US WILL WATCH, WHILE THE OTHER SLEEPS.
I'LL SLEEP FAR EASIER WITH YOU BETWEEN ME AND THE REST OF THE CITY, CONAN.
AND OF COURSE... YOU TOO, FAFNIR.
MEN'S FORTUNES ARE AS UNSTABLE AS THE RAGING SEA THAT WASHED US ASHORE, CIMMERIAN.
LAST NIGHT, I WAS CAPTAIN OF A PIRATE BAND... AND YOU WERE MY CAPTIVE.
NOW, WE'RE SWORD BROTHERS-- RIGHT-HAND MEN TO A USURPER QUEEN--
AND YOU, I THINK, SHALL SOON BE EVEN MORE THAN THAT!
HOW SO, VANIRMAN?
DON'T BE COY, MAN.
BY YMIR, THERE'S MORE... THAN FRIENDSHIP... IN THAT GIRL'S LONGING GLANCES AT YOU.
I'D...GO ON ...BUT THAT FIRE MAKES ME...SLEEPY...
YES... THE FIRE...
WHAT?! ASLEEP ALREADY?! WELL...IT'S BEEN A FULL DAY...
SLUMBER AWAY, FRIEND...AND IF YOU SNORE LOUD ENOUGH...TO KEEP ME AWAKE, TOO...
YET, EVEN AS HE SPEAKS, THE BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN IS AWARE OF A STRANGE WEARINESS WHICH RESTS UPON HIS BROW. HE SLUMPS BACK IN HIS BROAD CHAIR...
...THEN... I'LL... KEEP... WATCH...
HIS EYE-LIDS GROW HEAVY...
...AS HE DIMLY PERCEIVES A VIOLENT SWAYING OF ONE OF THE HEAVY CURTAINS NEARBY...

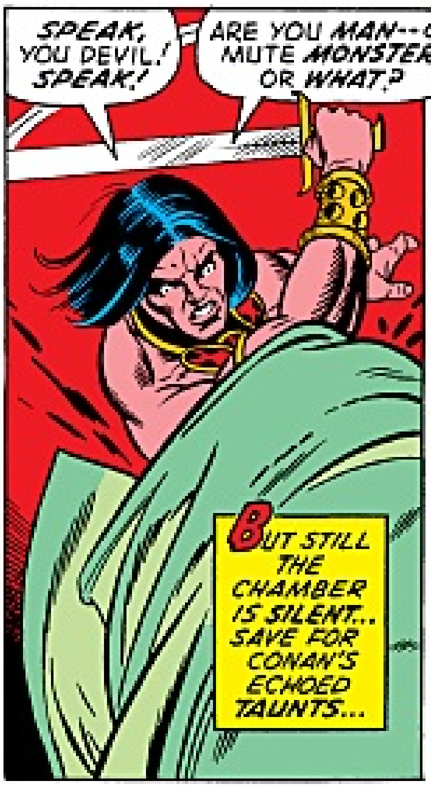

AND, AS HE SPRAWLS THERE, STRIVING VAGUELY TO PIERCE THE VEIL WHICH CLOAKS HIS MIND...
...A NIGHTMARE VISION SLINKS FROM BEHIND THE HANGINGS!
THEN, AS THE FOUL APPARITION HALTS DIRECTLY BEFORE HIM...
...AS GNARLED TALONS REACH FOR HIS TENSING THROAT...
...THE CIMMERIAN IS SUDDENLY, FEARFULLY AWARE THAT THIS NIGHTMARE IS--
REAL!
THE FIRE HAS NUMBED CONAN'S REFLEXES...
...SO THAT, THOUGH GRASPING FINGERS MISS HIS NECK...
...HE CANNOT ELUDE THE BRUTE'S SWIFT LUNGE!
BUT--THERE ARE OTHER WAYS!
BUT, THERE IS NO SOUND IN THE ROOM, SAVE CONAN'S OWN VOICE...
FAFNIR! WAKE UP, YOU LOG-SAWING OAF!
DO YOU THINK I WANT TO FIGHT THIS DEVIL ALL ALONE?
...AND THE SHARP LICKING OF THE FLAMES.

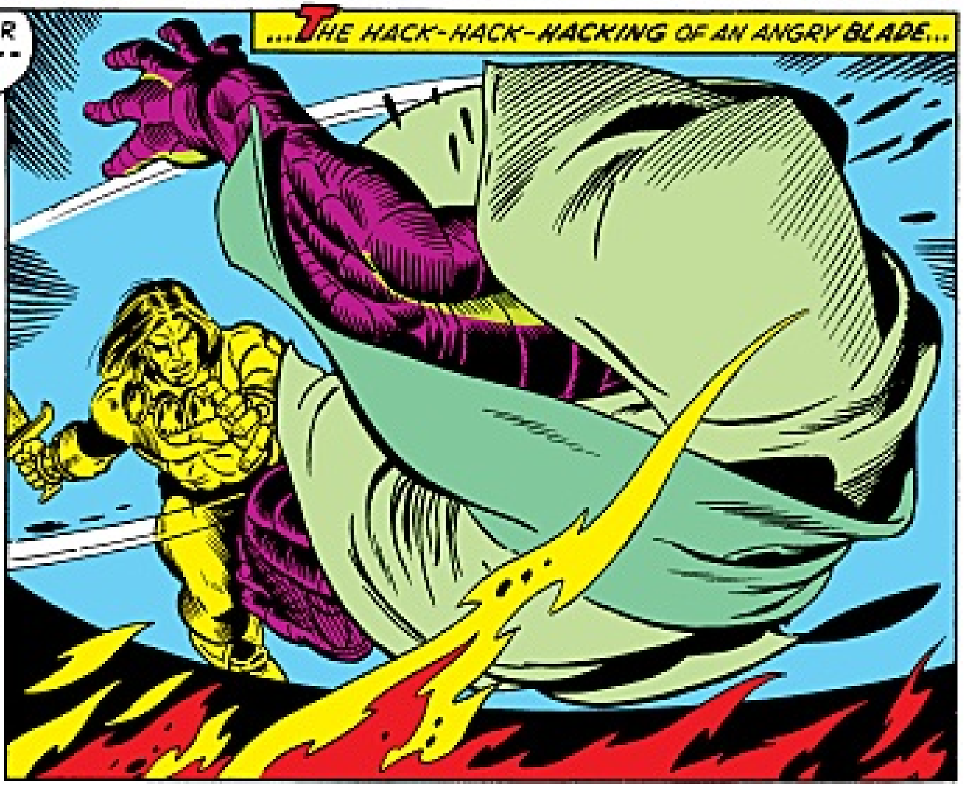

ONCE MORE THE HULKING BLACK DEMON CHARGES-- AND ONCE MORE, THE PANTHERISH BARBARIAN EVADES HIM, THOUGH NOT BY MUCH!
YET, PERHAPS... IT IS ENOUGH.

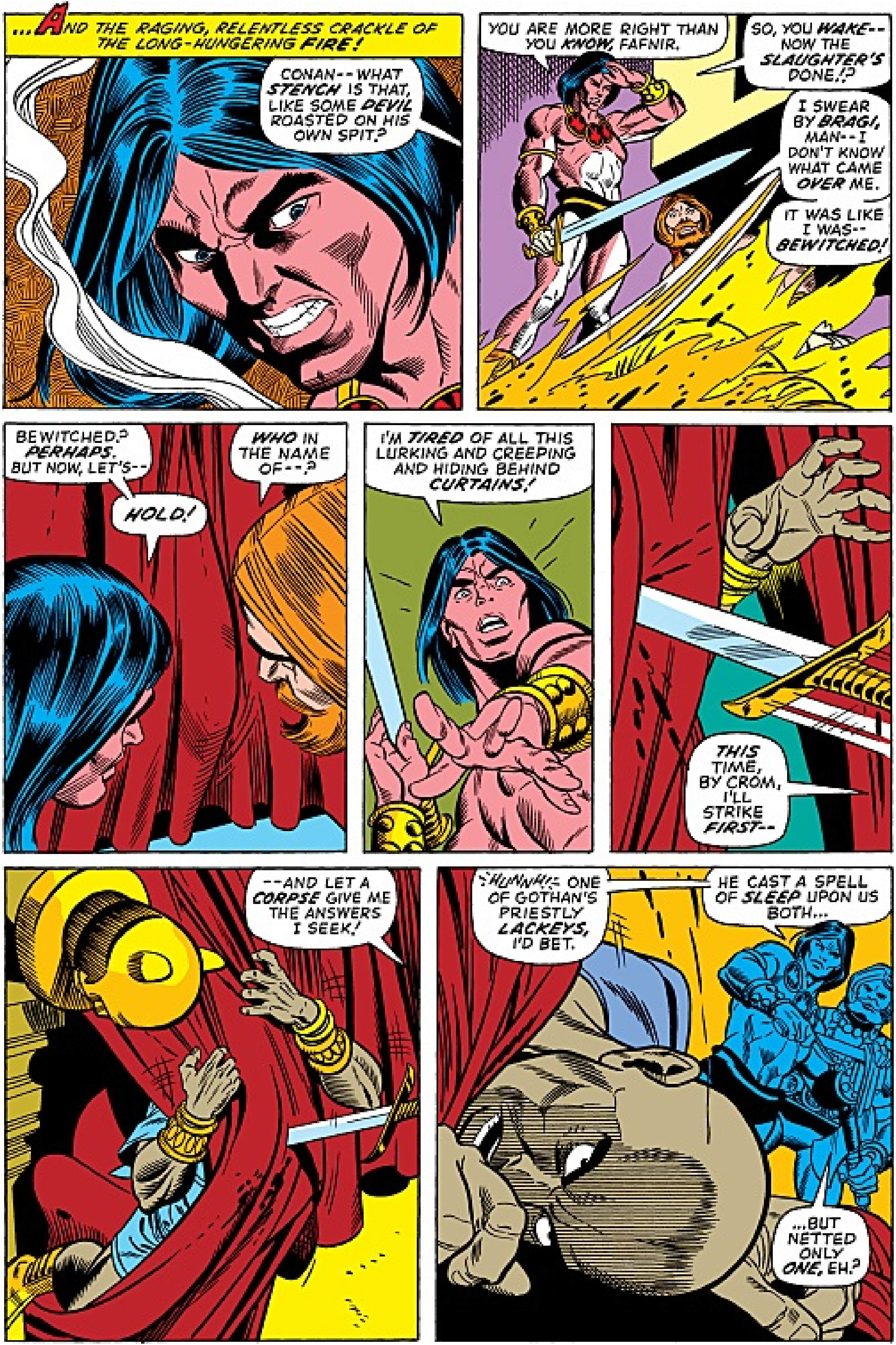

GIVE ME A GOOD SWORD, AND I'LL FIGHT ANYTHING IT CAN CUT!
NOW COME AHEAD, FIEND! FROM THE HANGINGS YOU CAME--

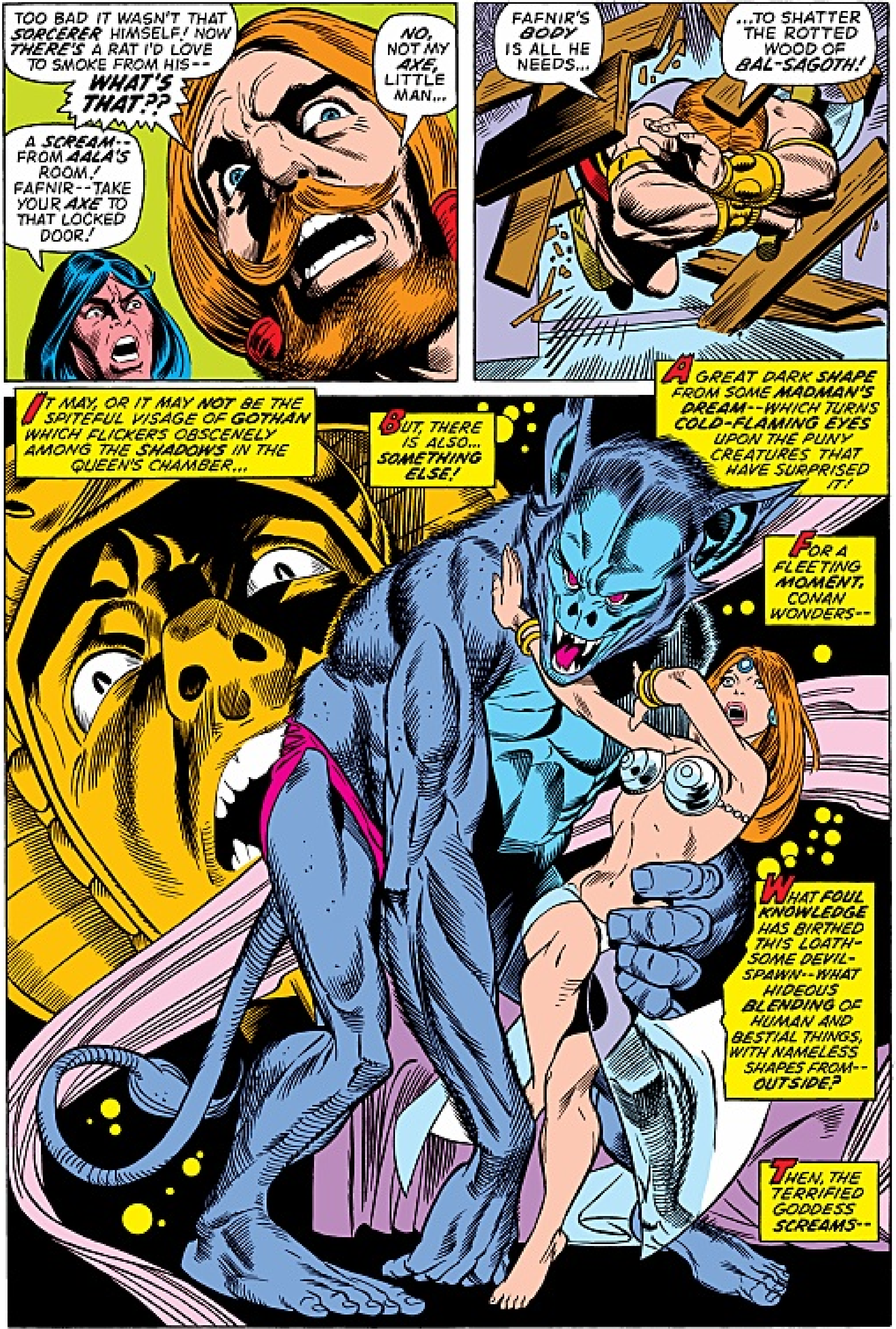

--AND TO THEM YOU'LL RETURN!

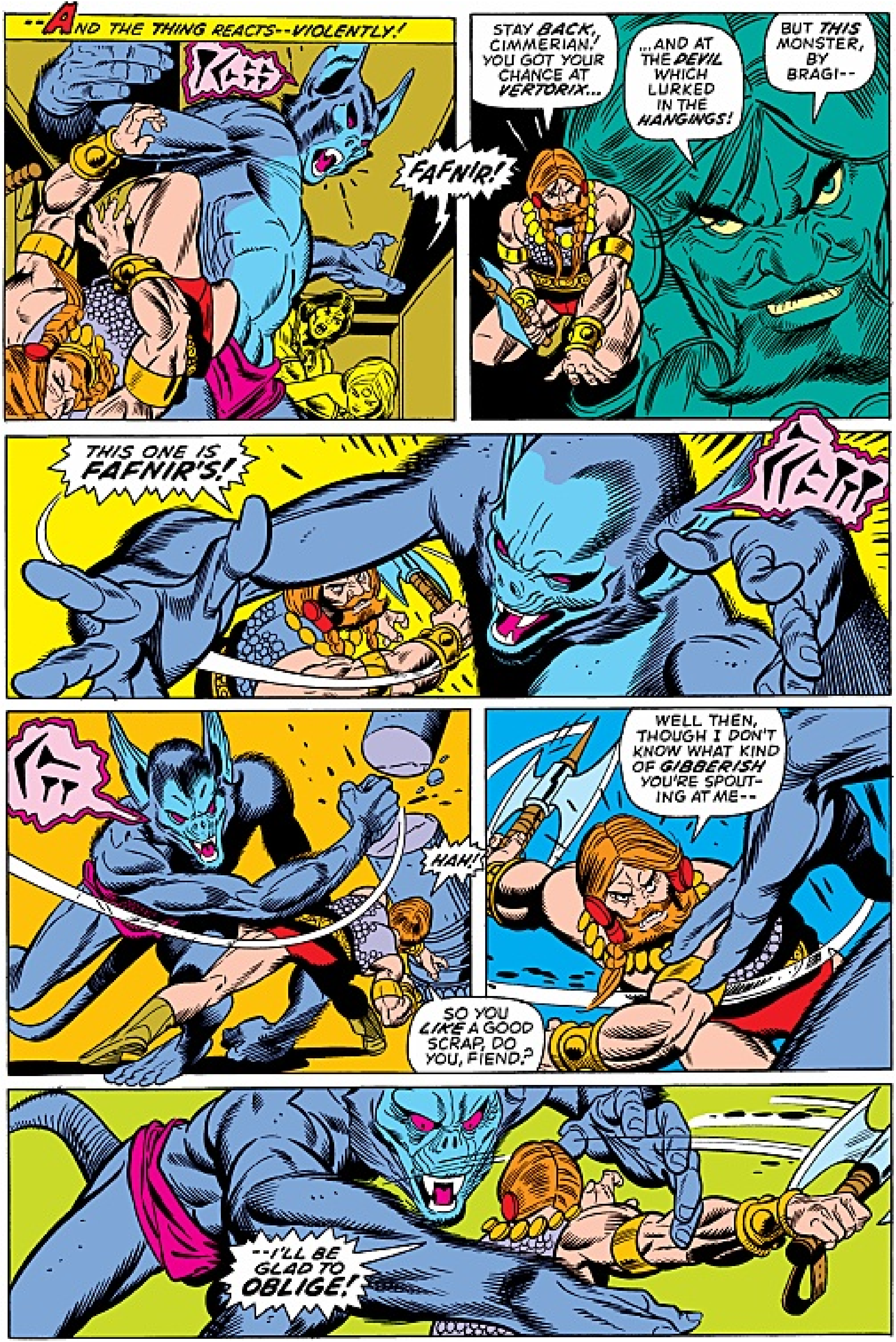

HAH! YOU'RE GOOD IN THE DARK--
BUT NOT THIS KIND OF DARK, HEY?
WELL? WHY DON'T YOU SAY SOMETHING?
GROWL, AT LEAST?

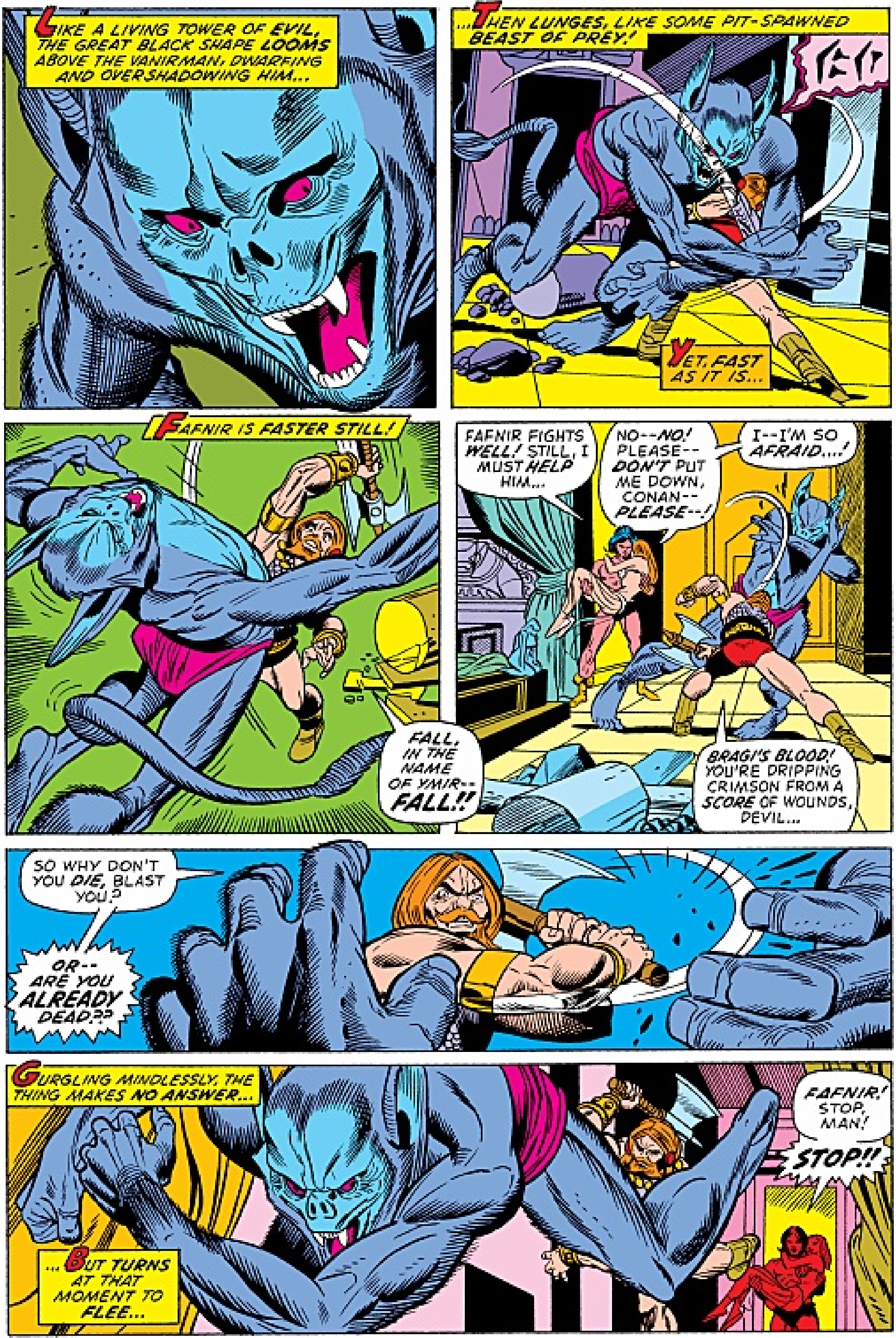

SPEAK, YOU DEVIL! SPEAK!
ARE YOU MAN--OR MUTE MONSTER--OR WHAT?
BUT STILL THE CHAMBER IS SILENT... SAVE FOR CONAN'S ECHOED TAUNTS...

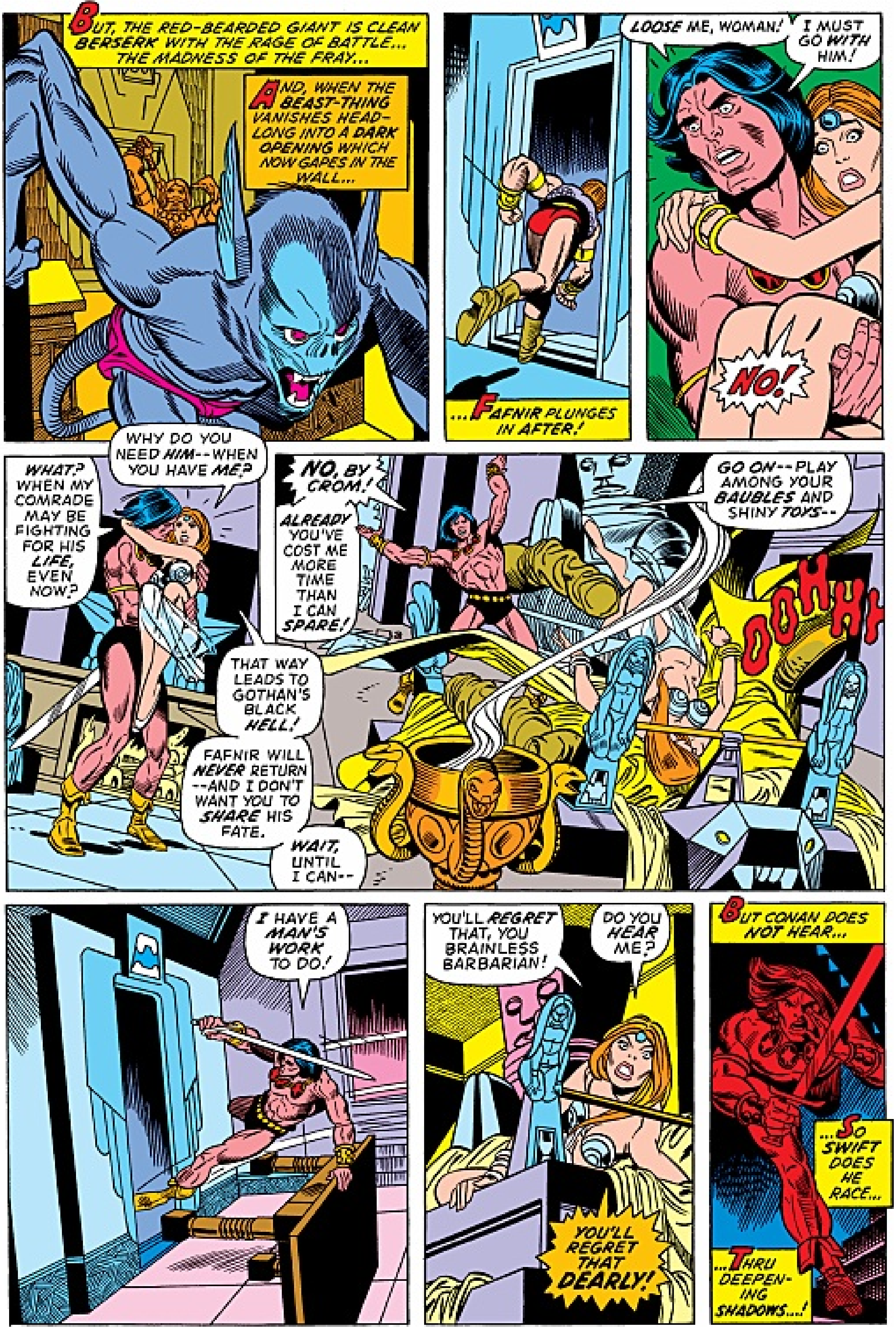

...THE HACK-HACK-HACKING OF AN ANGRY BLADE...

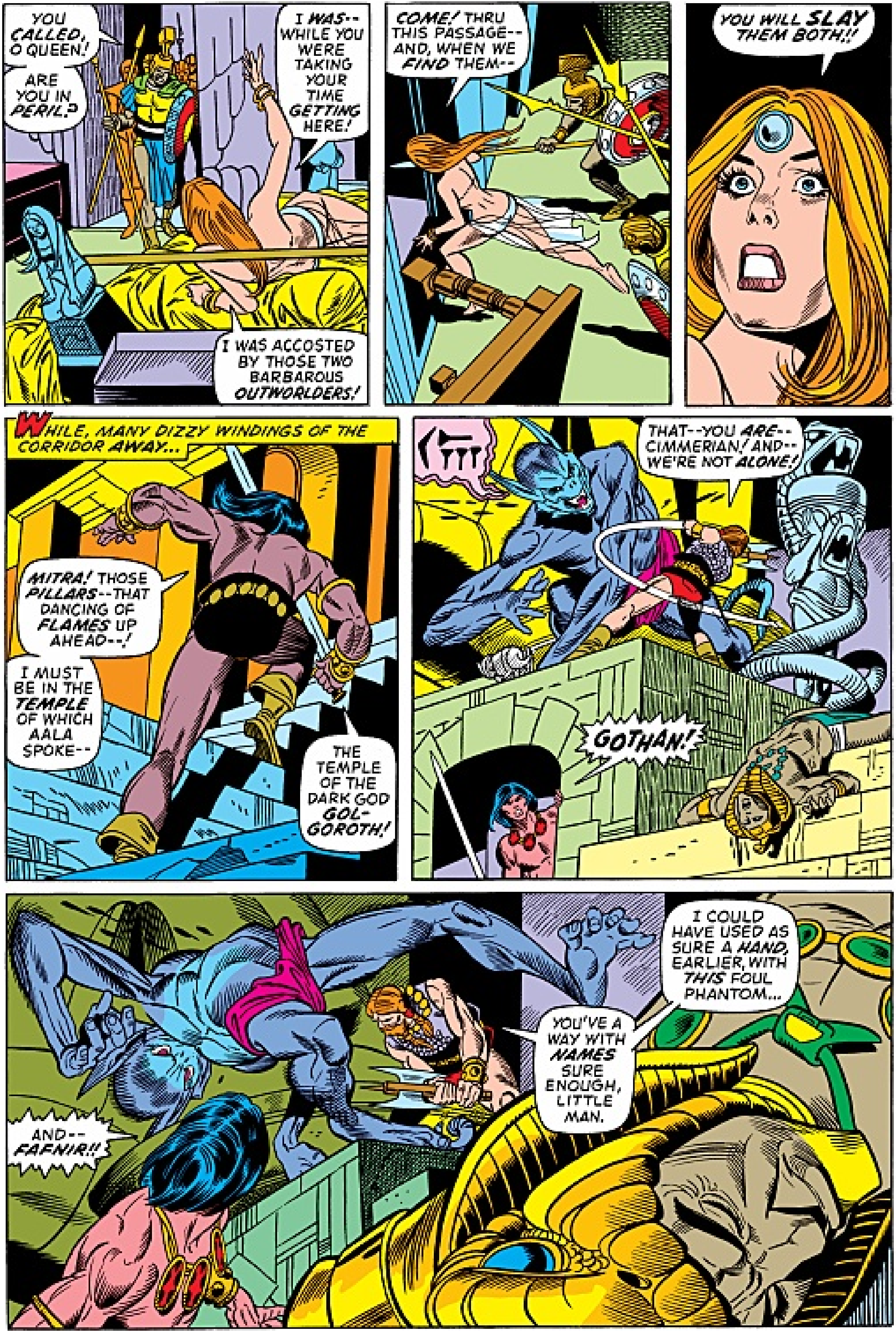

...AND THE RAGING, RELENTLESS CRACKLE OF THE LONG-HUNGERING FIRE!
CONAN--WHAT STENCH IS THAT, LIKE SOME DEVIL ROASTED ON HIS OWN SPIT?
YOU ARE MORE RIGHT THAN YOU KNOW, FAFNIR.
SO, YOU WAKE--NOW THE SLAUGHTER'S DONE!?
I SWEAR BY BRAGI, MAN--I DON'T KNOW WHAT CAME OVER ME.
IT WAS LIKE I WAS--BEWITCHED!
BEWITCHED? PERHAPS. BUT NOW, LET'S--
HOLD!
WHO IN THE NAME OF--?
I'M TIRED OF ALL THIS LURKING AND CREEPING AND HIDING BEHIND CURTAINS!
THIS TIME, BY CROM, I'LL STRIKE FIRST--
--AND LET A CORPSE GIVE ME THE ANSWERS I SEEK!
SHUNNH! ONE OF GOTHAN'S PRIESTLY LACKEYS, I'D BET.
HE CAST A SPELL OF SLEEP UPON US BOTH...
...BUT NETTED ONLY ONE, EH?

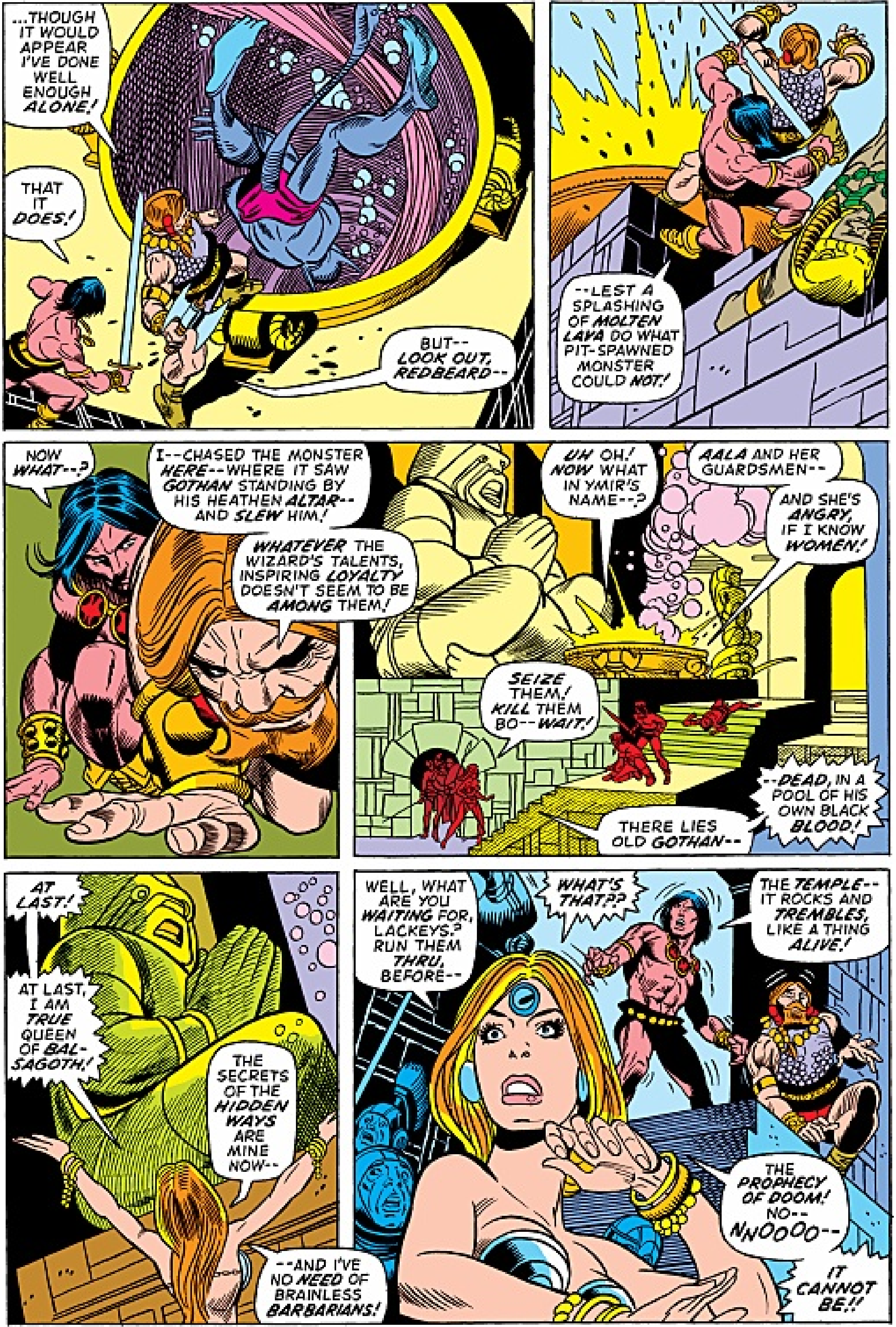

TOO BAD IT WASN'T THAT SORCERER HIMSELF! NOW THERE'S A RAT I'D LOVE TO SMOKE FROM HIS-- WHAT'S THAT??
A SCREAM-- FROM AALA'S ROOM! FAFNIR--TAKE YOUR AXE TO THAT LOCKED DOOR!
NO, NOT MY AXE, LITTLE MAN...
FAFNIR'S BODY IS ALL HE NEEDS...
...TO SHATTER THE ROTTED WOOD OF BAL-SAGOTH!
IT MAY, OR IT MAY NOT BE THE SPITEFUL VISAGE OF GOTHAN WHICH FLICKERS OBSCENELY AMONG THE SHADOWS IN THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER...
BUT, THERE IS ALSO... SOMETHING ELSE!
A GREAT DARK SHAPE FROM SOME MADMAN'S DREAM--WHICH TURNS COLD-FLAMING EYES UPON THE PUNY CREATURES THAT HAVE SURPRISED IT!
FOR A FLEETING MOMENT, CONAN WONDERS--
WHAT FOUL KNOWLEDGE HAS BIRTHED THIS LOATHSOME DEVIL-SPAWN--WHAT HIDEOUS BLENDING OF HUMAN AND BESTIAL THINGS, WITH NAMELESS SHAPES FROM--OUTSIDE?
THEN, THE TERRIFIED GODDESS SCREAMS--

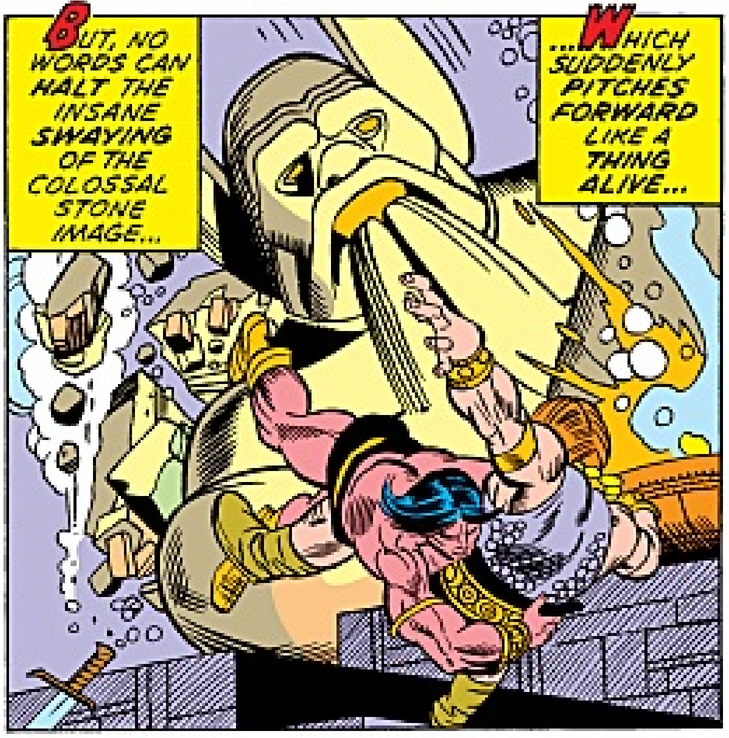

--AND THE THING REACTS--VIOLENTLY!
FAFNIR!
STAY BACK, CIMMERIAN! YOU GOT YOUR CHANCE AT VERTORIX...
...AND AT THE DEVIL WHICH LURKED IN THE HANGINGS!
BUT THIS MONSTER, BY BRAGI--
THIS ONE IS FAFNIR'S!
HAH!
WELL THEN, THOUGH I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF GIBBERISH YOU'RE SPOUTING AT ME--
SO YOU LIKE A GOOD SCRAP, DO YOU, FIEND?
--I'LL BE GLAD TO OBLIGE!

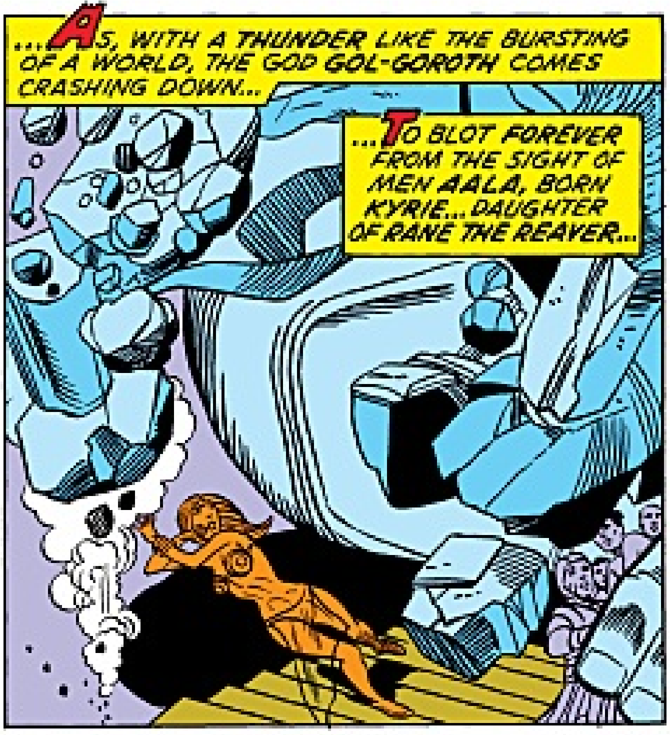

LIKE A LIVING TOWER OF EVIL, THE GREAT BLACK SHAPE LOOMS ABOVE THE VANIRMAN, DWARFING AND OVERSHADOWING HIM...
...THEN LUNGES, LIKE SOME PIT-SPAWNED BEAST OF PREY!
YET, FAST AS IT IS...
FAFNIR IS FASTER STILL!
FALL, IN THE NAME OF YMIR-- FALL!!
FAFNIR FIGHTS WELL! STILL, I MUST HELP HIM...
NO--NO! PLEASE-- DON'T PUT ME DOWN, CONAN-- PLEASE--!
I--I'M SO AFRAID...!
BRAGI'S BLOOD! YOU'RE DRIPPING CRIMSON FROM A SCORE OF WOUNDS, DEVIL...
SO WHY DON'T YOU DIE, BLAST YOU?
OR-- ARE YOU ALREADY DEAD??
GURGLING MINDLESSLY, THE THING MAKES NO ANSWER...
FAFNIR! STOP, MAN! STOP!!
...BUT TURNS AT THAT MOMENT TO FLEE...

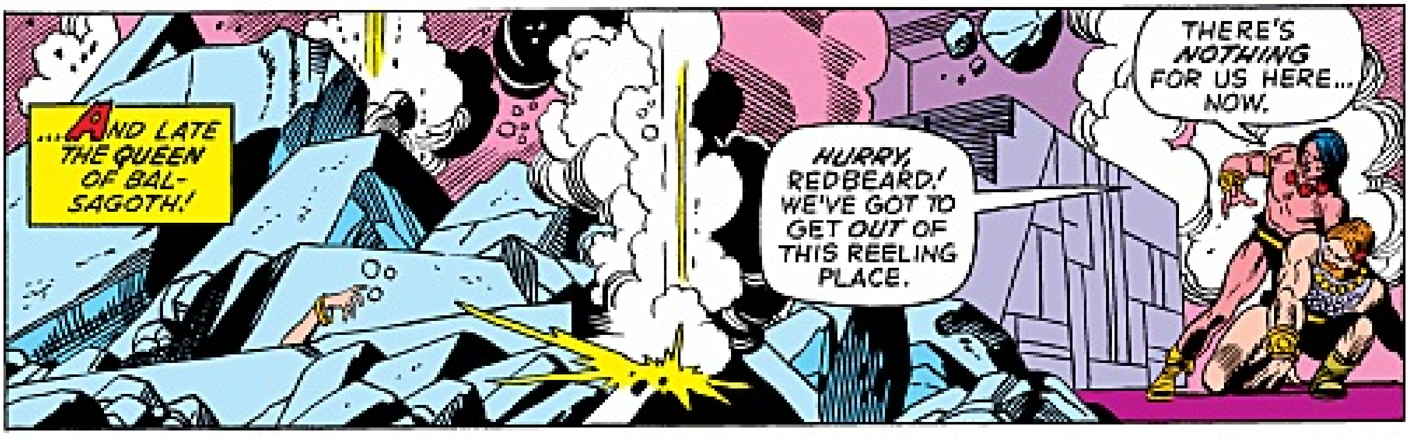

BUT, THE RED-BEARDED GIANT IS CLEAN BERSERK WITH THE RAGE OF BATTLE... THE MADNESS OF THE FRAY...
AND, WHEN THE BEAST-THING VANISHES HEADLONG INTO A DARK OPENING WHICH NOW GAPES IN THE WALL...
...FAFNIR PLUNGES IN AFTER!
LOOSE ME, WOMAN!
I MUST GO WITH HIM!
NO!
WHY DO YOU NEED HIM--WHEN YOU HAVE ME?
WHAT? WHEN MY COMRADE MAY BE FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE, EVEN NOW?
NO, BY CROM!
ALREADY YOU'VE COST ME MORE TIME THAN I CAN SPARE!
GO ON--PLAY AMONG YOUR BAUBLES AND SHINY TOYS--
OOHHH
THAT WAY LEADS TO GOTHAN'S BLACK HELL!
FAFNIR WILL NEVER RETURN--AND I DON'T WANT YOU TO SHARE HIS FATE.
WAIT, UNTIL I CAN--
I HAVE A MAN'S WORK TO DO!
YOU'LL REGRET THAT, YOU BRAINLESS BARBARIAN!
DO YOU HEAR ME?
YOU'LL REGRET THAT DEARLY!
BUT CONAN DOES NOT HEAR...
...SO SWIFT DOES HE RACE...
...THRU DEEPENING SHADOWS...!

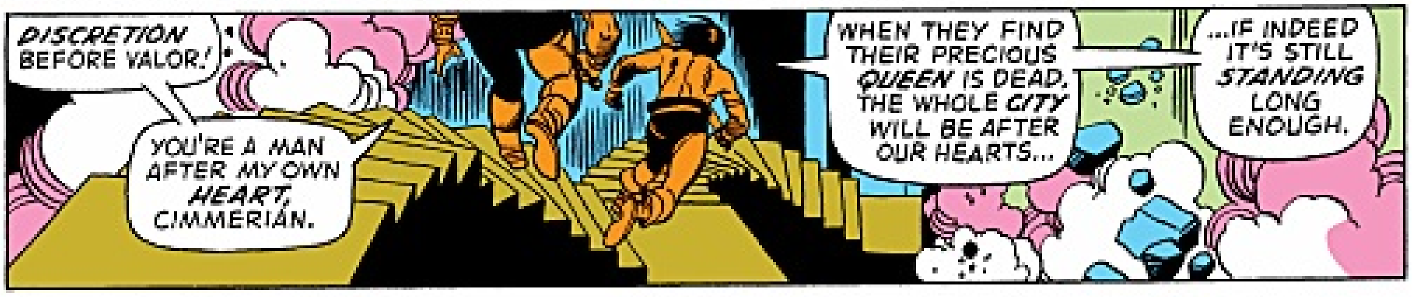

YOU CALLED, O QUEEN!
ARE YOU IN PERIL?
I WAS--WHILE YOU WERE TAKING YOUR TIME GETTING HERE!
I WAS ACCOSTED BY THOSE TWO BARBAROUS OUTWORLDERS!
COME! THRU THIS PASSAGE--AND, WHEN WE FIND THEM--
YOU WILL SLAY THEM BOTH!!
WHILE, MANY DIZZY WINDINGS OF THE CORRIDOR AWAY...
MITRA! THOSE PILLARS--THAT DANCING OF FLAMES UP AHEAD--!
I MUST BE IN THE TEMPLE OF WHICH AALA SPOKE--
THE TEMPLE OF THE DARK GOD GOL-GOROTH!
THAT--YOU ARE--CIMMERIAN! AND--WE'RE NOT ALONE!
GOTHAN!
I COULD HAVE USED AS SURE A HAND, EARLIER, WITH THIS FOUL PHANTOM...
AND--FAFNIR!!
YOU'VE A WAY WITH NAMES SURE ENOUGH, LITTLE MAN.

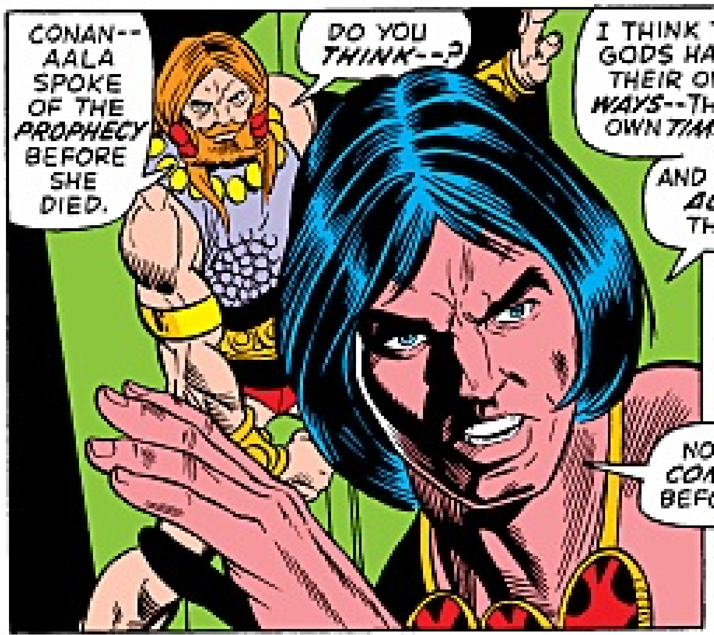

...THOUGH IT WOULD APPEAR I'VE DONE WELL ENOUGH ALONE!
THAT IT DOES!
BUT-- LOOK OUT, REDBEARD--
--LEST A SPLASHING OF MOLTEN LAVA DO WHAT PIT-SPAWNED MONSTER COULD NOT!
NOW WHAT--?
I--CHASED THE MONSTER HERE--WHERE IT SAW GOTHAN STANDING BY HIS HEATHEN ALTAR-- AND SLEW HIM!
WHATEVER THE WIZARD'S TALENTS, INSPIRING LOYALTY DOESN'T SEEM TO BE AMONG THEM!
UH OH! NOW WHAT IN YMIR'S NAME--?
AALA AND HER GUARDSMEN--
AND SHE'S ANGRY, IF I KNOW WOMEN!
SEIZE THEM! KILL THEM BO--WAIT!
THERE LIES OLD GOTHAN--
--DEAD, IN A POOL OF HIS OWN BLACK BLOOD!
AT LAST!
AT LAST, I AM TRUE QUEEN OF BAL-SAGOTH!
THE SECRETS OF THE HIDDEN WAYS ARE MINE NOW--
--AND I'VE NO NEED OF BRAINLESS BARBARIANS!
WELL, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, LACKEYS? RUN THEM THRU, BEFORE--
WHAT'S THAT??
THE TEMPLE-- IT ROCKS AND TREMBLES, LIKE A THING ALIVE!
THE PROPHECY OF DOOM! NO-- NNOOOO--
IT CANNOT BE!!

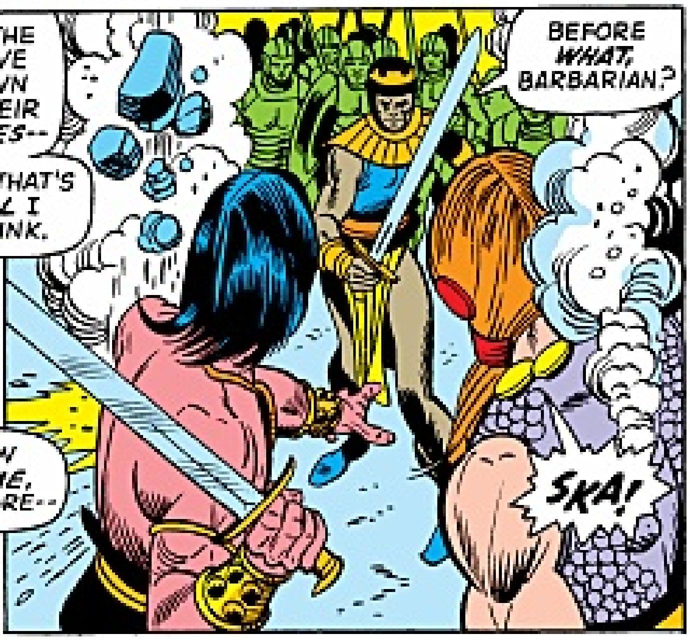

BUT, NO WORDS CAN HALT THE INSANE SWAYING OF THE COLOSSAL STONE IMAGE...
...WHICH SUDDENLY PITCHES FORWARD LIKE A THING ALIVE...

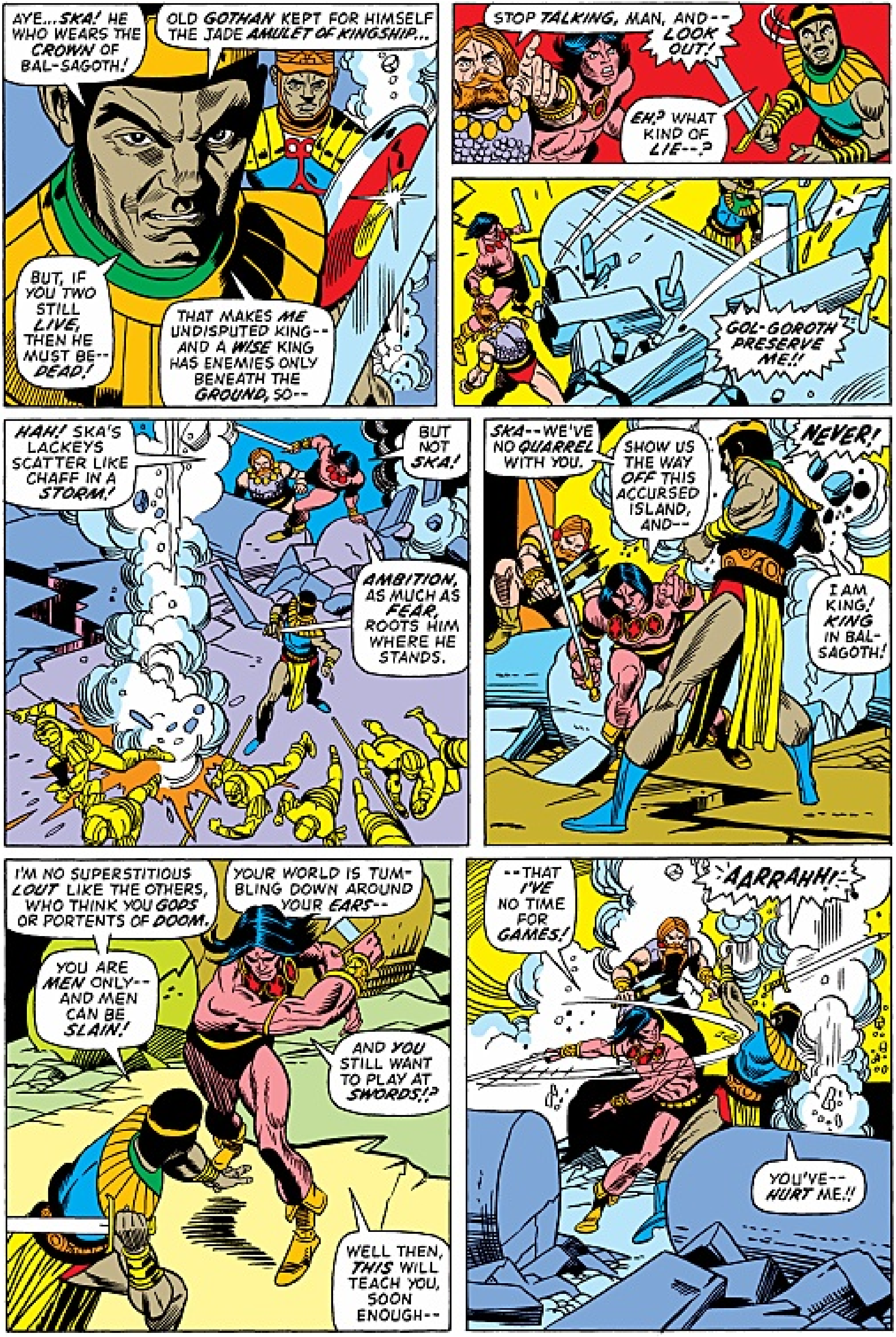

...AS, WITH A THUNDER LIKE THE BURSTING OF A WORLD, THE GOD GOL-GOROTH COMES CRASHING DOWN...
...TO BLOT FOREVER FROM THE SIGHT OF MEN AALA, BORN KYRIE... DAUGHTER OF RANE THE REAVER...

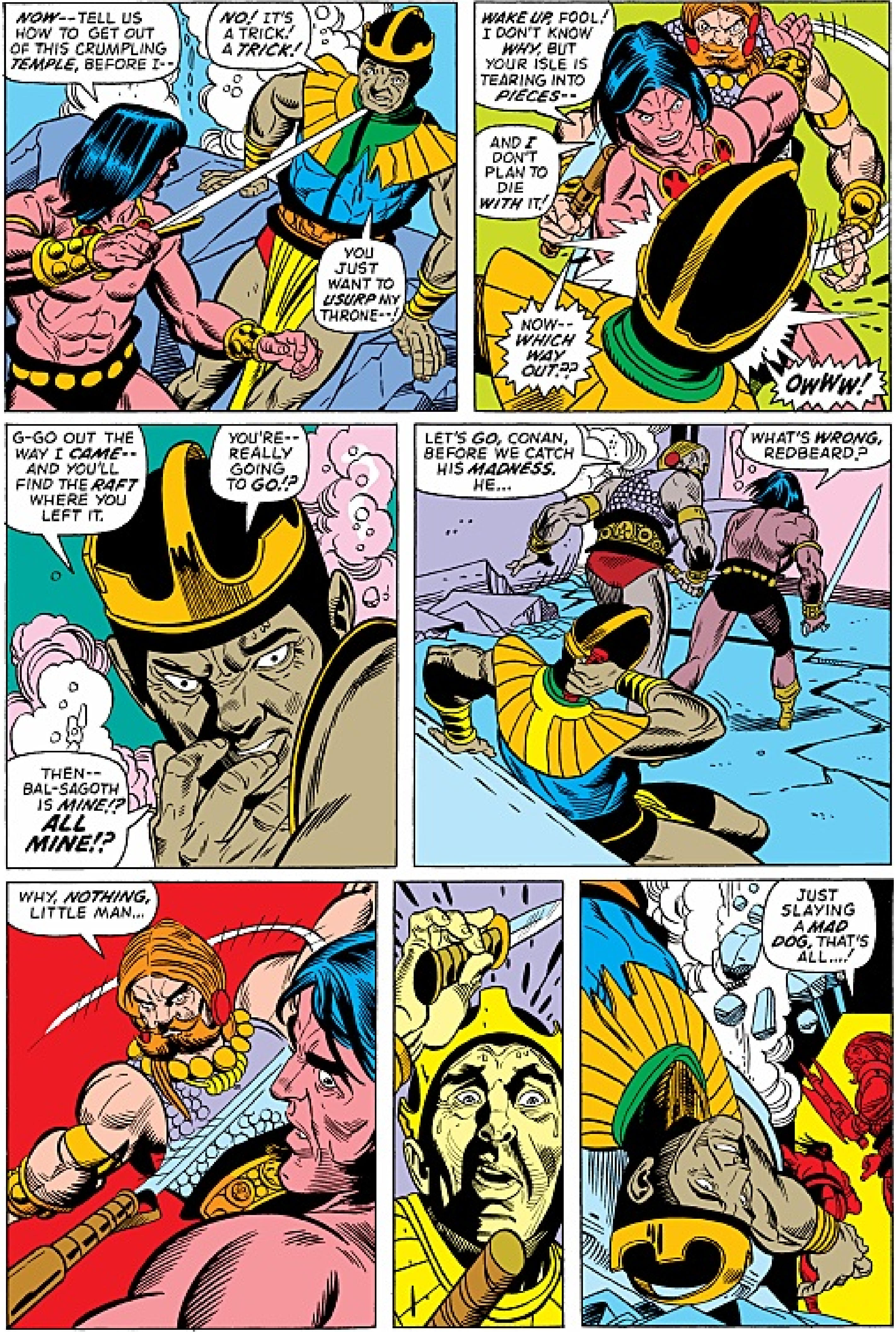

...AND LATE THE QUEEN OF BAL-SAGOTH!
THERE'S NOTHING FOR US HERE... NOW.
HURRY, REDBEARD! WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THIS REELING PLACE.

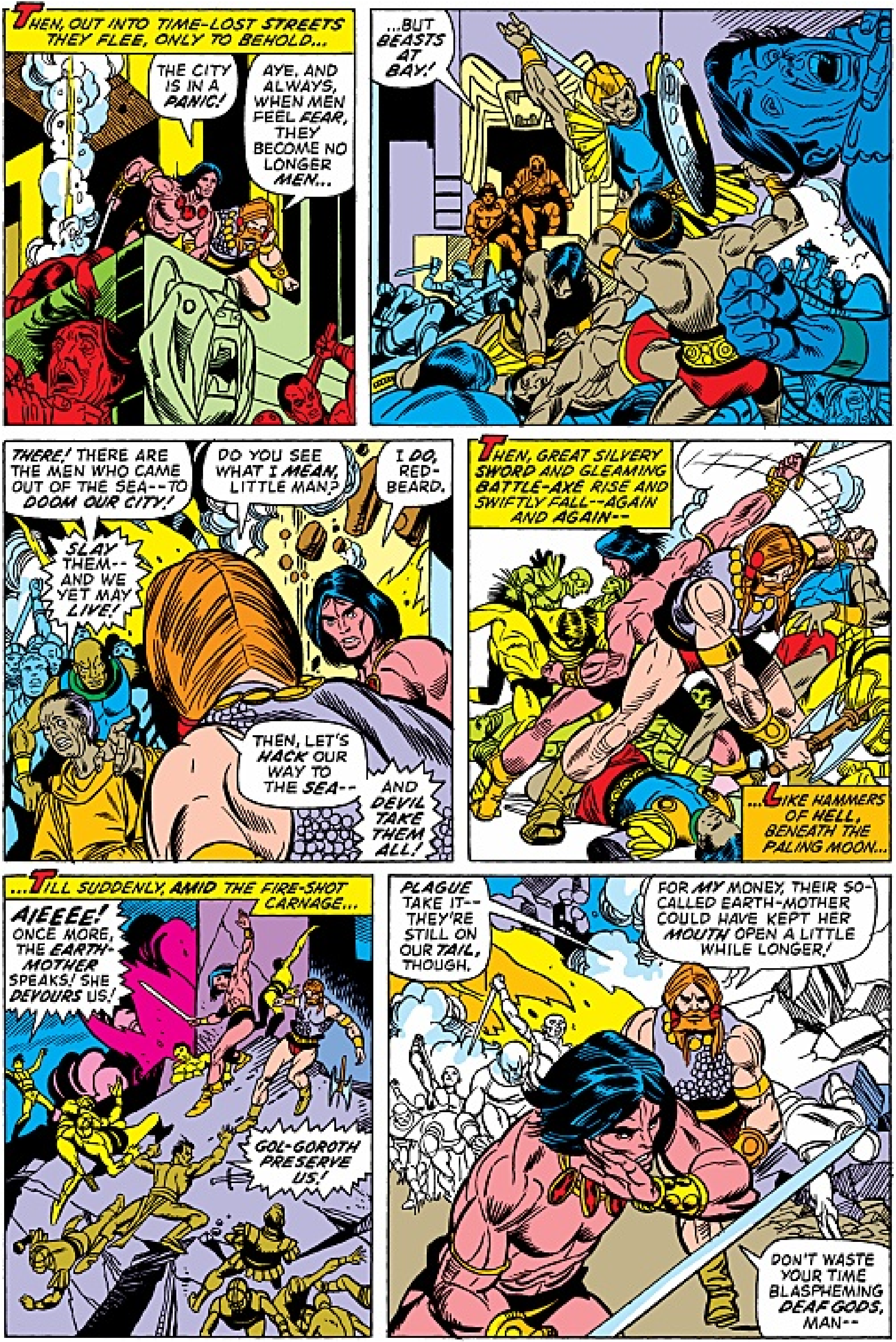

DISCRETION BEFORE VALOR!
YOU'RE A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART, CIMMERIAN.
WHEN THEY FIND THEIR PRECIOUS QUEEN IS DEAD, THE WHOLE CITY WILL BE AFTER OUR HEARTS...
...IF INDEED IT'S STILL STANDING LONG ENOUGH.

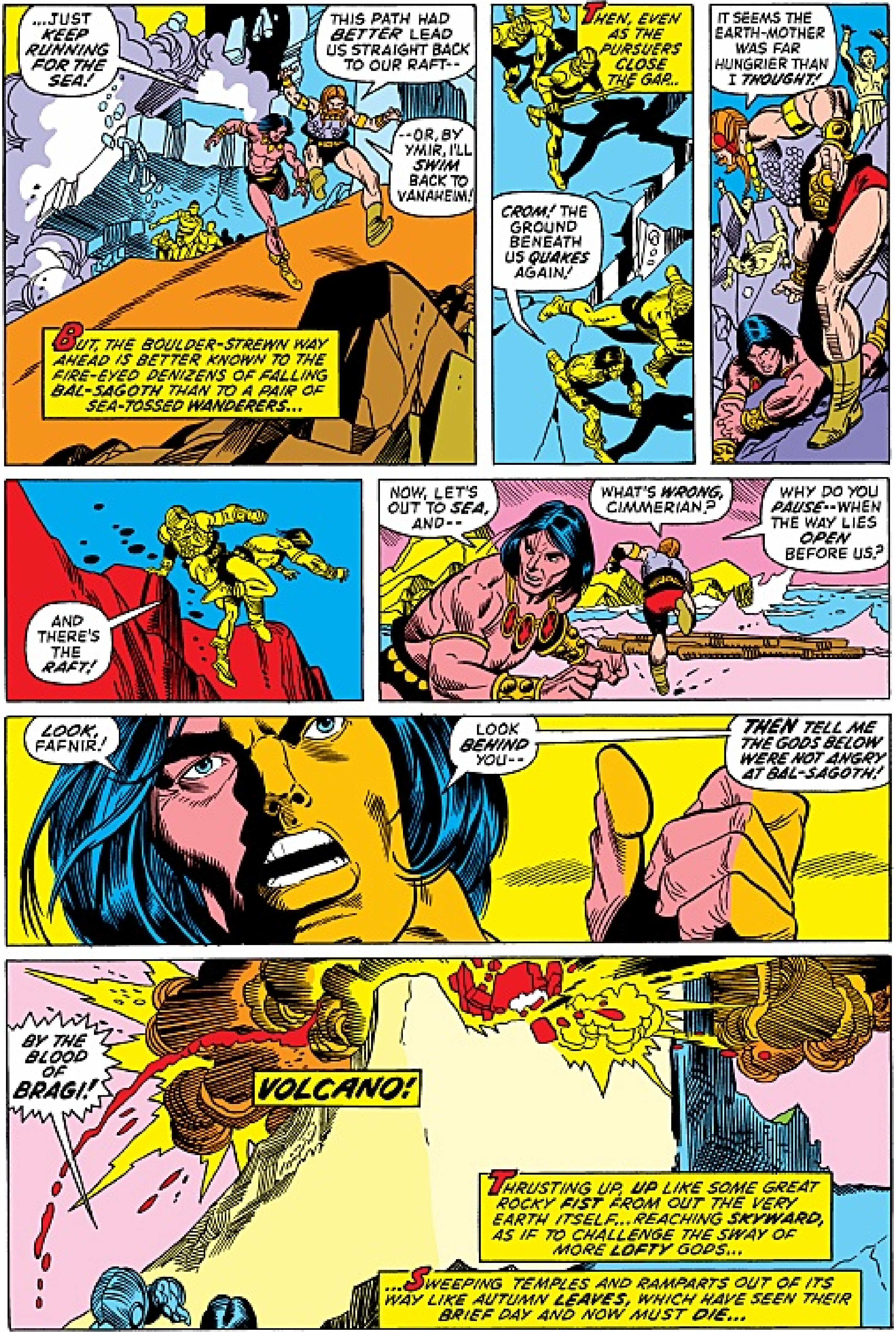

CONAN-- AALA SPOKE OF THE PROPHECY BEFORE SHE DIED.
DO YOU THINK--?
I THINK THE GODS HAVE THEIR OWN WAYS--THEIR OWN TIMES--
AND THAT'S ALL I THINK.
NOW COME, BEFORE--

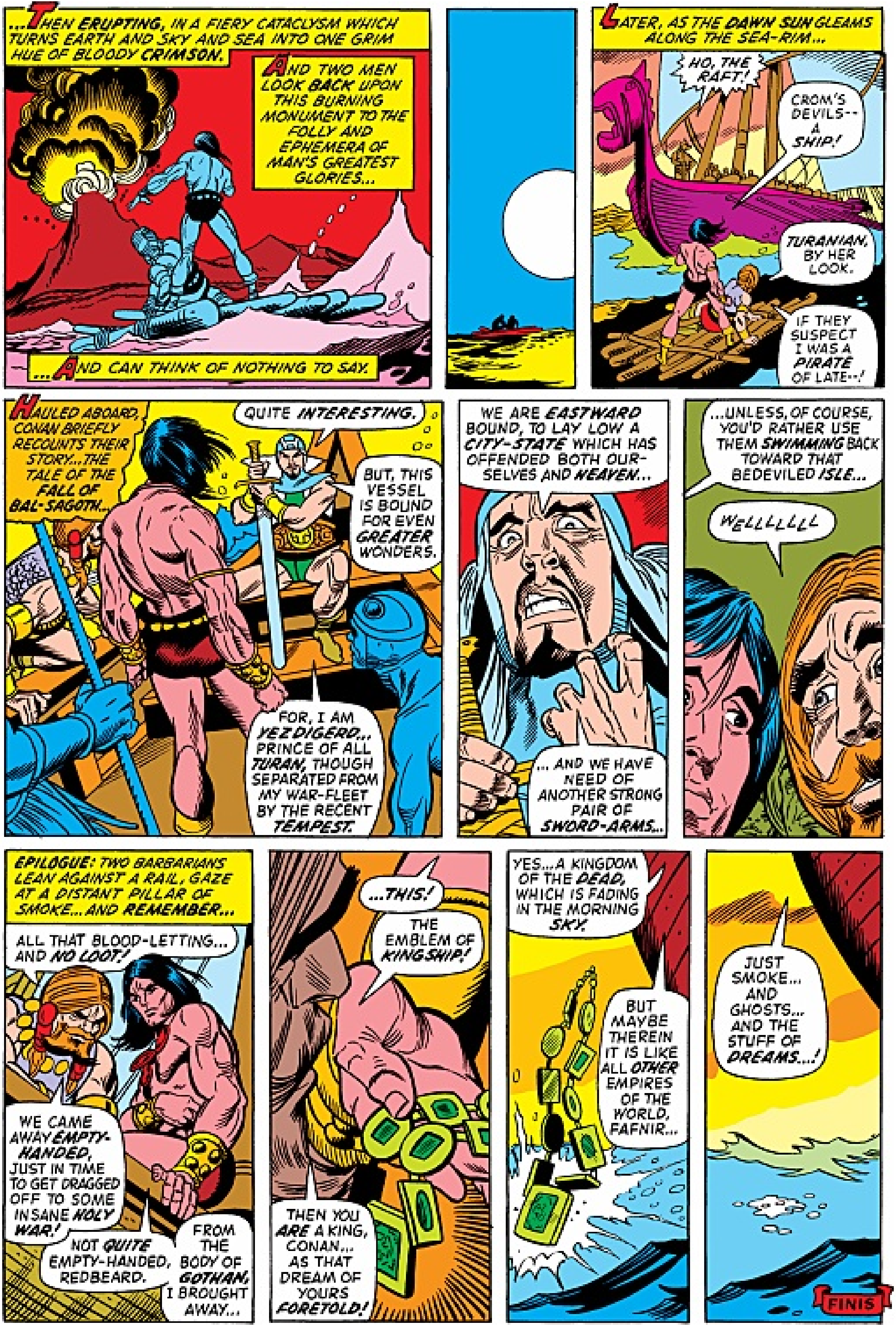

BEFORE WHAT, BARBARIAN?
SKA!

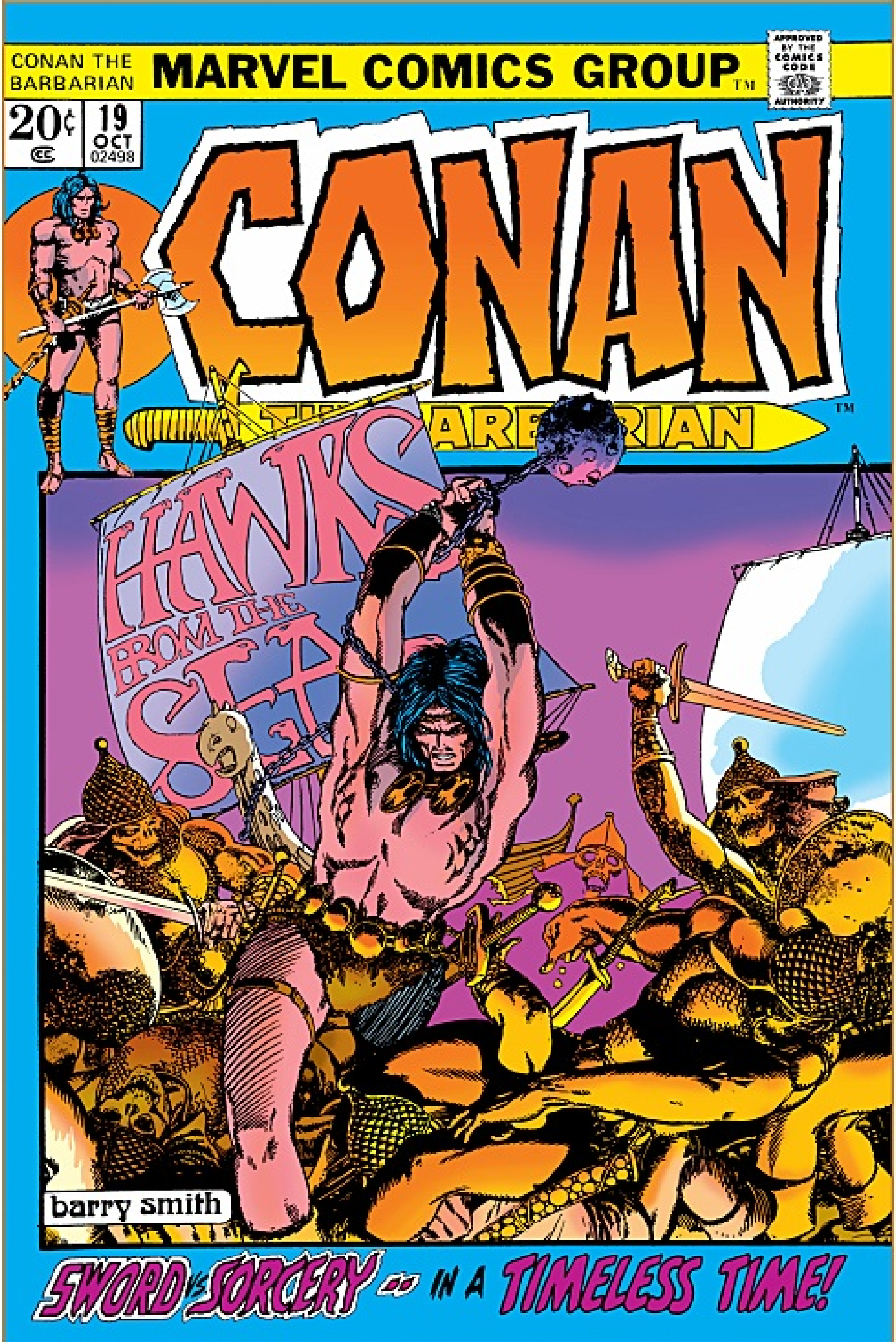

AYE...SKA! HE WHO WEARS THE CROWN OF BAL-SAGOTH!
OLD GOTHAN KEPT FOR HIMSELF THE JADE AMULET OF KINGSHIP...
BUT, IF YOU TWO STILL LIVE, THEN HE MUST BE--DEAD!
THAT MAKES ME UNDISPUTED KING--AND A WISE KING HAS ENEMIES ONLY BENEATH THE GROUND, SO--
STOP TALKING, MAN, AND--
LOOK OUT!
EH? WHAT KIND OF LIE--?
GOL-GOROTH PRESERVE ME!!
HAH! SKA'S LACKEYS SCATTER LIKE CHAFF IN A STORM!
BUT NOT SKA!
AMBITION, AS MUCH AS FEAR, ROOTS HIM WHERE HE STANDS.
SKA--WE'VE NO QUARREL WITH YOU.
SHOW US THE WAY OFF THIS ACCURSED ISLAND, AND--
NEVER!
I AM KING! KING IN BAL-SAGOTH!
I'M NO SUPERSTITIOUS LOUT LIKE THE OTHERS, WHO THINK YOU GODS OR PORTENTS OF DOOM.
YOU ARE MEN ONLY--AND MEN CAN BE SLAIN!
YOUR WORLD IS TUMBLING DOWN AROUND YOUR EARS--
AND YOU STILL WANT TO PLAY AT SWORDS!?
WELL THEN, THIS WILL TEACH YOU, SOON ENOUGH--
--THAT I'VE NO TIME FOR GAMES!
AARRAHH!
YOU'VE--HURT ME!!


NOW--TELL US HOW TO GET OUT OF THIS CRUMPLING TEMPLE, BEFORE I--
NO! IT'S A TRICK! A TRICK!
YOU JUST WANT TO USURP MY THRONE--!
WAKE UP, FOOL! I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT YOUR ISLE IS TEARING INTO PIECES--
AND I DON'T PLAN TO DIE WITH IT!
NOW--WHICH WAY OUT??
OWWW!
G-GO OUT THE WAY I CAME--AND YOU'LL FIND THE RAFT WHERE YOU LEFT IT.
YOU'RE--REALLY GOING TO GO!?
THEN--BAL-SAGOTH IS MINE!? ALL MINE!?
LET'S GO, CONAN, BEFORE WE CATCH HIS MADNESS. HE...
WHAT'S WRONG, REDBEARD?
WHY, NOTHING, LITTLE MAN...
JUST SLAYING A MAD DOG, THAT'S ALL...!


THEN, OUT INTO TIME-LOST STREETS THEY FLEE, ONLY TO BEHOLD...
THE CITY IS IN A *PANIC!*
AYE, AND ALWAYS, WHEN MEN FEEL *FEAR*, THEY BECOME NO LONGER *MEN...*
...BUT *BEASTS AT BAY!*
THERE! THERE ARE THE MEN WHO CAME OUT OF THE SEA--TO *DOOM OUR CITY!*
DO YOU SEE WHAT I *MEAN*, LITTLE MAN?
I *DO*, RED-BEARD.
SLAY THEM--AND WE YET MAY *LIVE!*
THEN, LET'S *HACK* OUR WAY TO THE *SEA--*
AND *DEVIL TAKE THEM ALL!*
THEN, GREAT SILVERY SWORD AND GLEAMING BATTLE-AXE RISE AND SWIFTLY FALL--AGAIN AND AGAIN--
...LIKE HAMMERS OF HELL, BENEATH THE PALING MOON...
...TILL SUDDENLY, AMID THE FIRE-SHOT CARNAGE...
AIEEEE! ONCE MORE, THE *EARTH-MOTHER* SPEAKS! SHE *DEVOURS* US!
GOL-GOROTH PRESERVE US!
PLAGUE TAKE IT--THEY'RE STILL ON OUR *TAIL*, THOUGH.
FOR *MY* MONEY, THEIR SO-CALLED EARTH-MOTHER COULD HAVE KEPT HER *MOUTH* OPEN A LITTLE WHILE LONGER!
DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME BLASPHEMING *DEAF GODS*, MAN--


...JUST KEEP RUNNING FOR THE SEA!
THIS PATH HAD BETTER LEAD US STRAIGHT BACK TO OUR RAFT--
--OR, BY YMIR, I'LL SWIM BACK TO VANAHEIM!
BUT, THE BOULDER-STREWN WAY AHEAD IS BETTER KNOWN TO THE FIRE-EYED DENIZENS OF FALLING BAL-SAGOTH THAN TO A PAIR OF SEA-TOSSED WANDERERS...
THEN, EVEN AS THE PURSUERS CLOSE THE GAP..
CROM! THE GROUND BENEATH US QUAKES AGAIN!
IT SEEMS THE EARTH-MOTHER WAS FAR HUNGRIER THAN I THOUGHT!
AND THERE'S THE RAFT!
NOW, LET'S OUT TO SEA, AND--
WHAT'S WRONG, CIMMERIAN?
WHY DO YOU PAUSE--WHEN THE WAY LIES OPEN BEFORE US?
LOOK, FAFNIR!
LOOK BEHIND YOU--
THEN TELL ME THE GODS BELOW WERE NOT ANGRY AT BAL-SAGOTH!
BY THE BLOOD OF BRAGI!
VOLCANO!
THRUSTING UP, UP LIKE SOME GREAT ROCKY FIST FROM OUT THE VERY EARTH ITSELF...REACHING SKYWARD, AS IF TO CHALLENGE THE SWAY OF MORE LOFTY GODS...
...SWEEPING TEMPLES AND RAMPARTS OUT OF ITS WAY LIKE AUTUMN LEAVES, WHICH HAVE SEEN THEIR BRIEF DAY AND NOW MUST DIE...


...THEN ERUPTING, IN A FIERY CATACLYSM WHICH TURNS EARTH AND SKY AND SEA INTO ONE GRIM HUE OF BLOODY CRIMSON.
AND TWO MEN LOOK BACK UPON THIS BURNING MONUMENT TO THE FOLLY AND EPHEMERA OF MAN'S GREATEST GLORIES...
...AND CAN THINK OF NOTHING TO SAY.
LATER, AS THE DAWN SUN GLEAMS ALONG THE SEA-RIM...
HO, THE RAFT!
CROM'S DEVILS-- A SHIP!
TURANIAN, BY HER LOOK.
IF THEY SUSPECT I WAS A PIRATE OF LATE--!
HAULED ABOARD, CONAN BRIEFLY RECOUNTS THEIR STORY...THE TALE OF THE FALL OF BAL-SAGOTH...
QUITE INTERESTING.
BUT, THIS VESSEL IS BOUND FOR EVEN GREATER WONDERS.
FOR, I AM YEZDIGERD... PRINCE OF ALL TURAN, THOUGH SEPARATED FROM MY WAR-FLEET BY THE RECENT TEMPEST.
WE ARE EASTWARD BOUND, TO LAY LOW A CITY-STATE WHICH HAS OFFENDED BOTH OURSELVES AND HEAVEN...
... AND WE HAVE NEED OF ANOTHER STRONG PAIR OF SWORD-ARMS...
...UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU'D RATHER USE THEM SWIMMING BACK TOWARD THAT BEDEVILED ISLE...
WELLLLLLL
EPILOGUE: TWO BARBARIANS LEAN AGAINST A RAIL, GAZE AT A DISTANT PILLAR OF SMOKE... AND REMEMBER...
ALL THAT BLOOD-LETTING... AND NO LOOT!
WE CAME AWAY EMPTY-HANDED, JUST IN TIME TO GET DRAGGED OFF TO SOME INSANE HOLY WAR!
NOT QUITE EMPTY-HANDED, REDBEARD.
FROM THE BODY OF GOTHAN, I BROUGHT AWAY...
...THIS!
THE EMBLEM OF KINGSHIP!
THEN YOU ARE A KING, CONAN... AS THAT DREAM OF YOURS FORETOLD!
YES...A KINGDOM OF THE DEAD, WHICH IS FADING IN THE MORNING SKY.
BUT MAYBE THEREIN IT IS LIKE ALL OTHER EMPIRES OF THE WORLD, FAFNIR...
JUST SMOKE... AND GHOSTS... AND THE STUFF OF DREAMS...!
FINIS


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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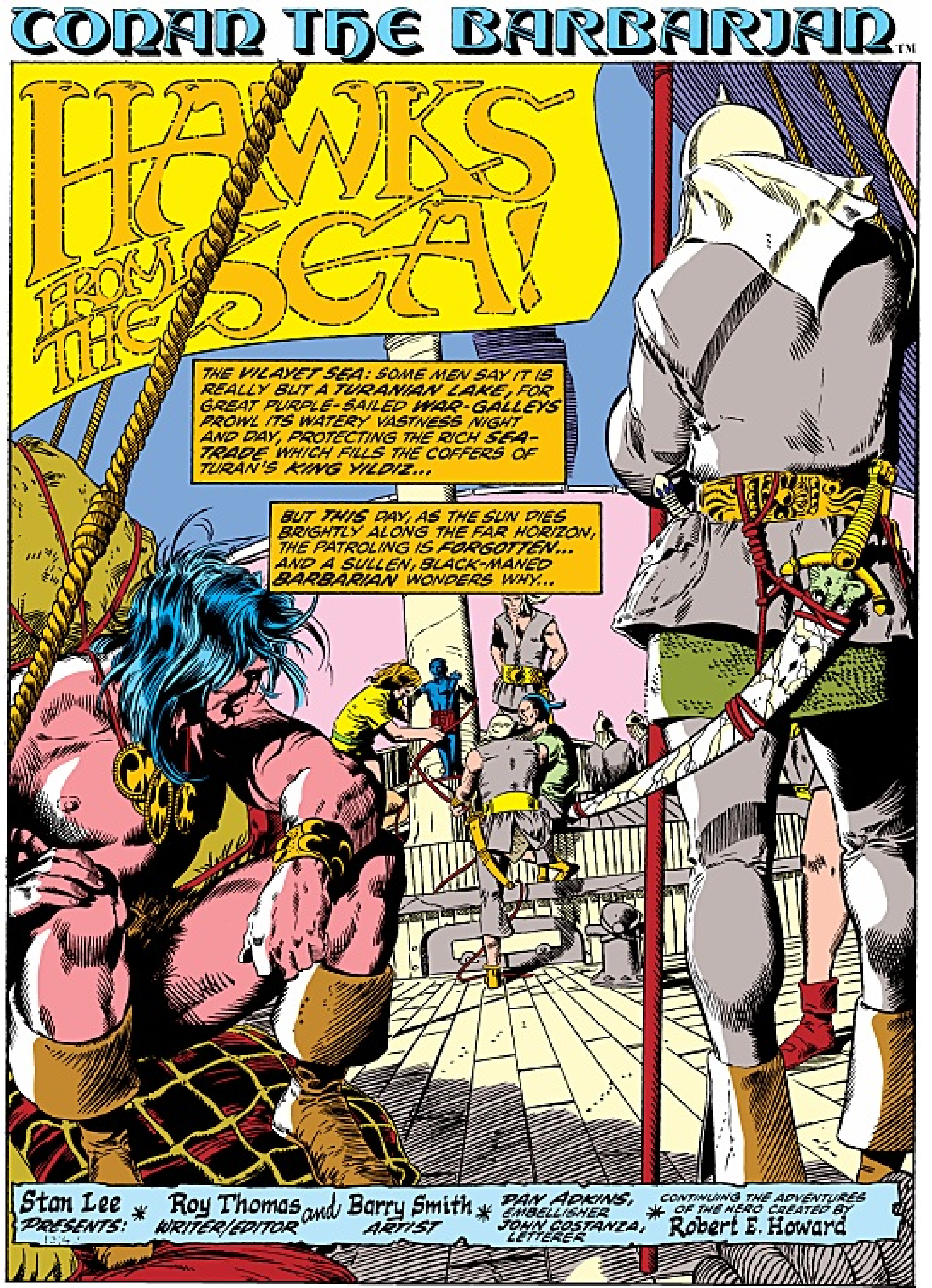
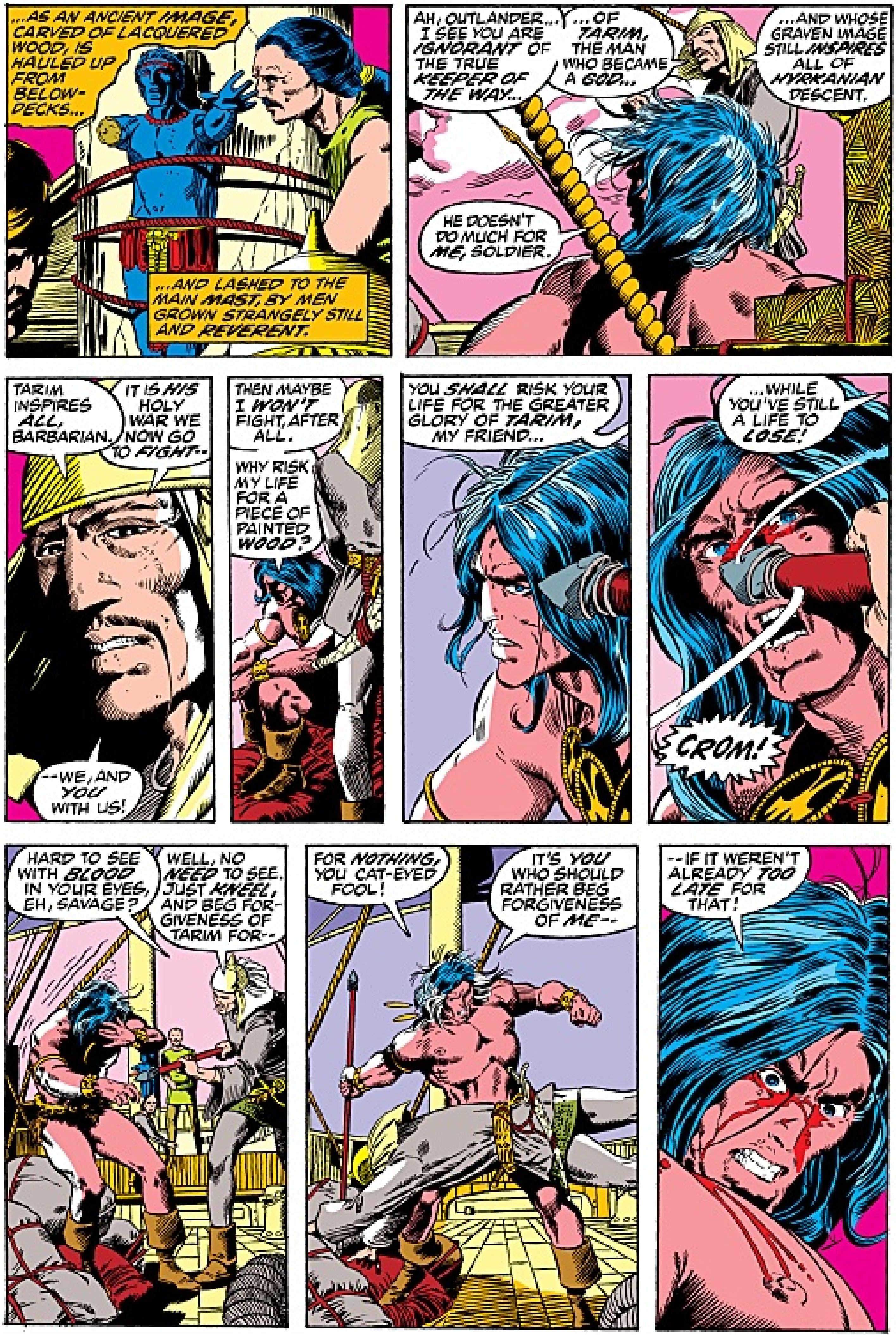
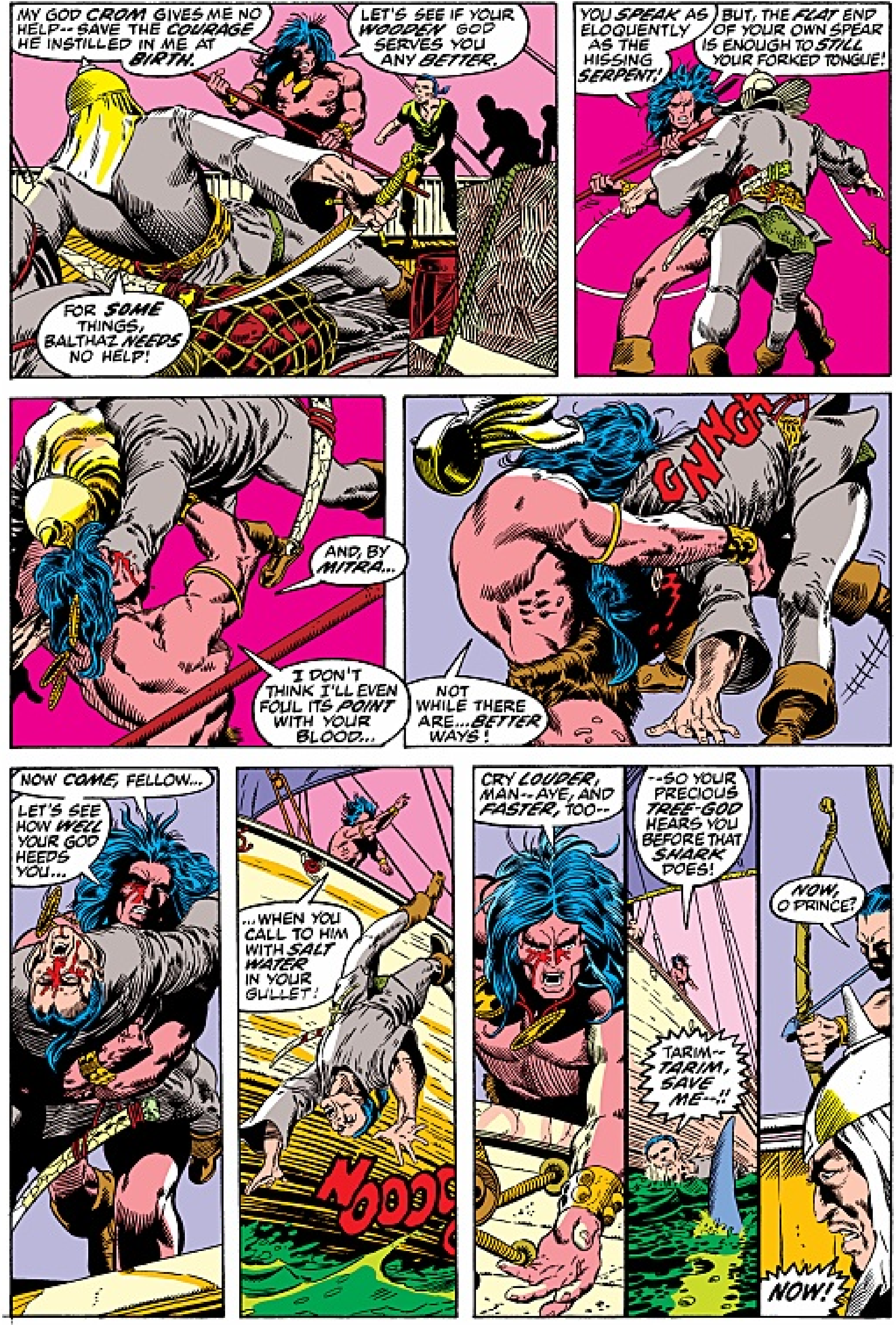
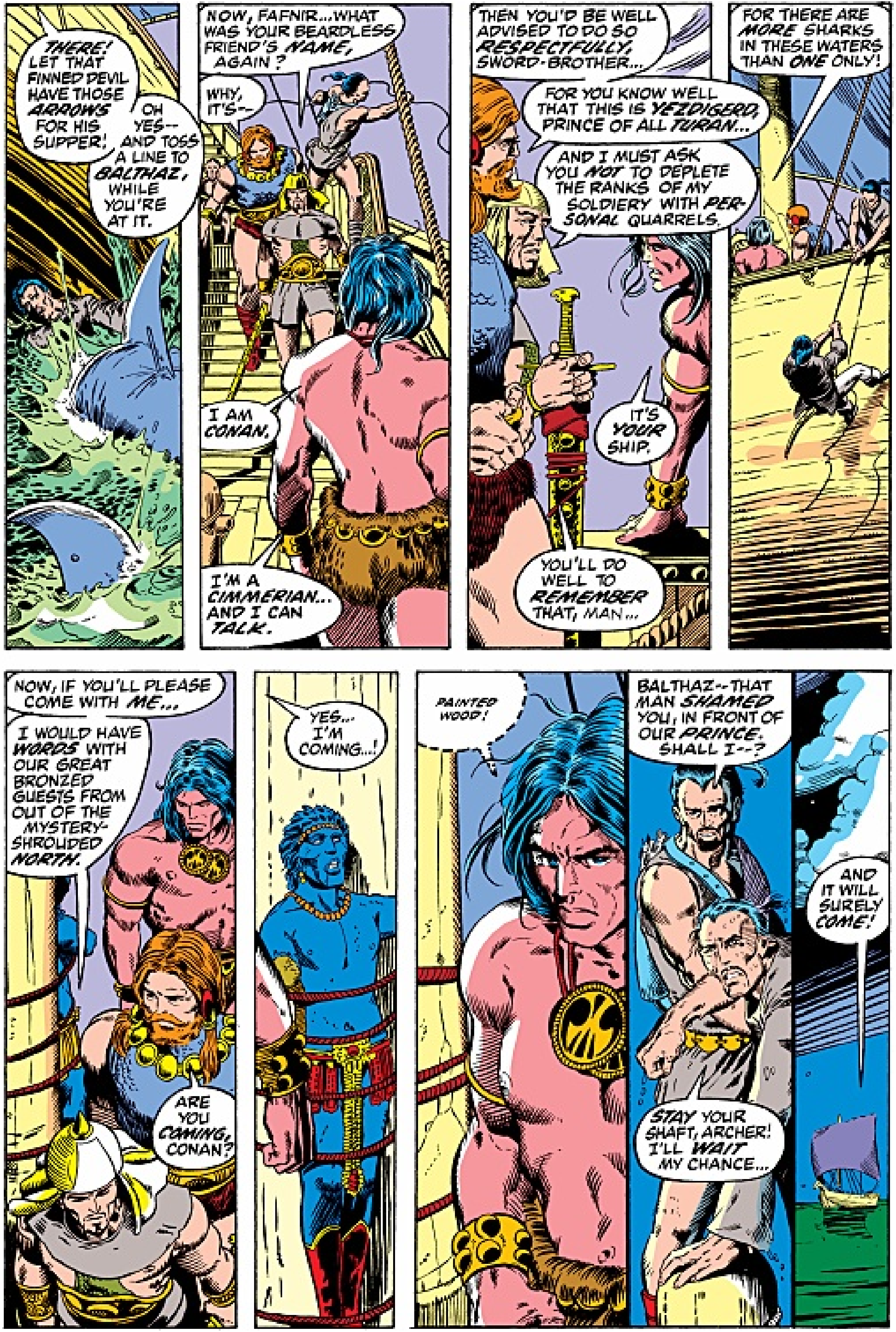
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN™
HAWKS FROM THE SEA
barry smith
SWORD & SORCERY -- IN A TIMELESS TIME!

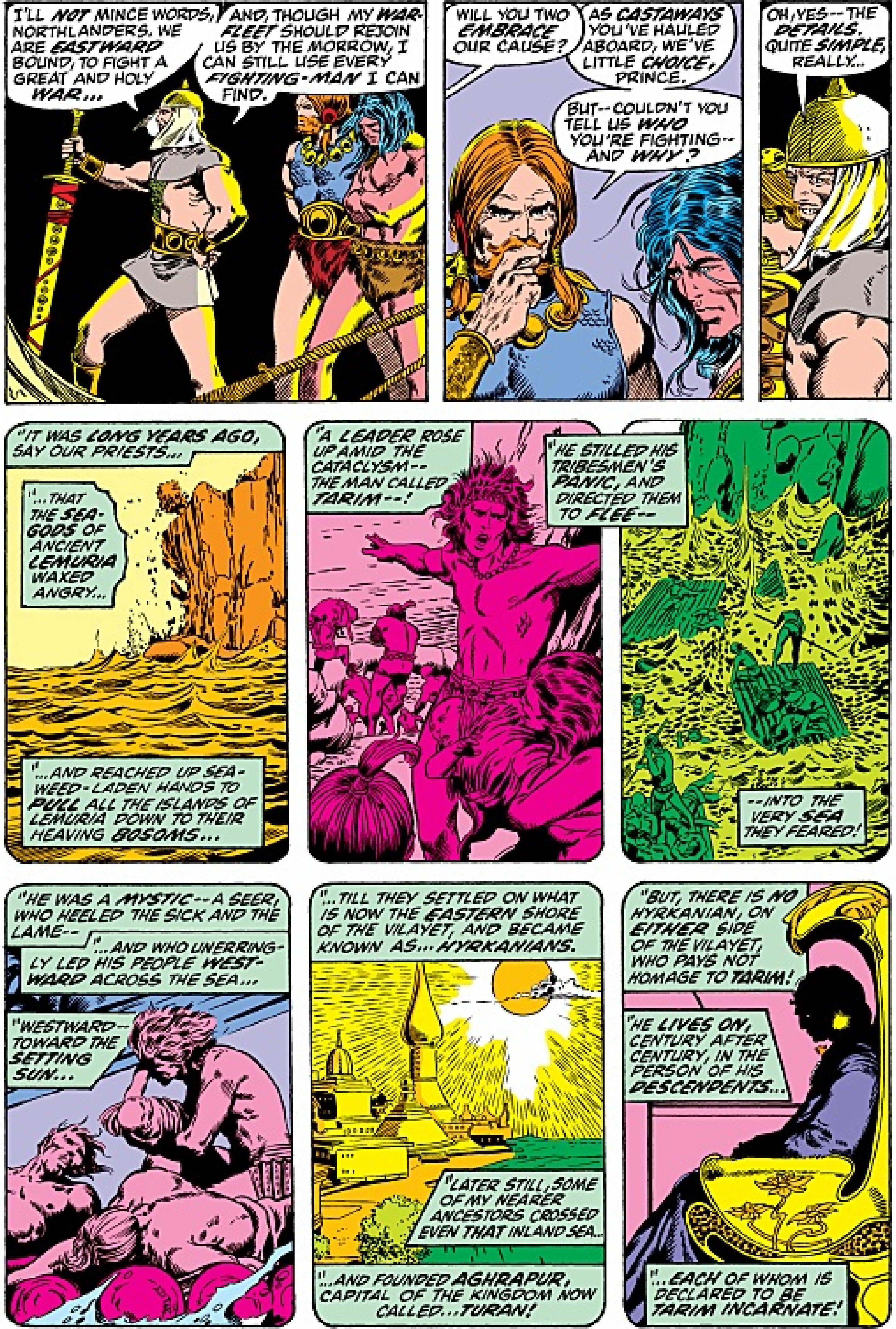
COVER ARTIST & COLORIST: BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

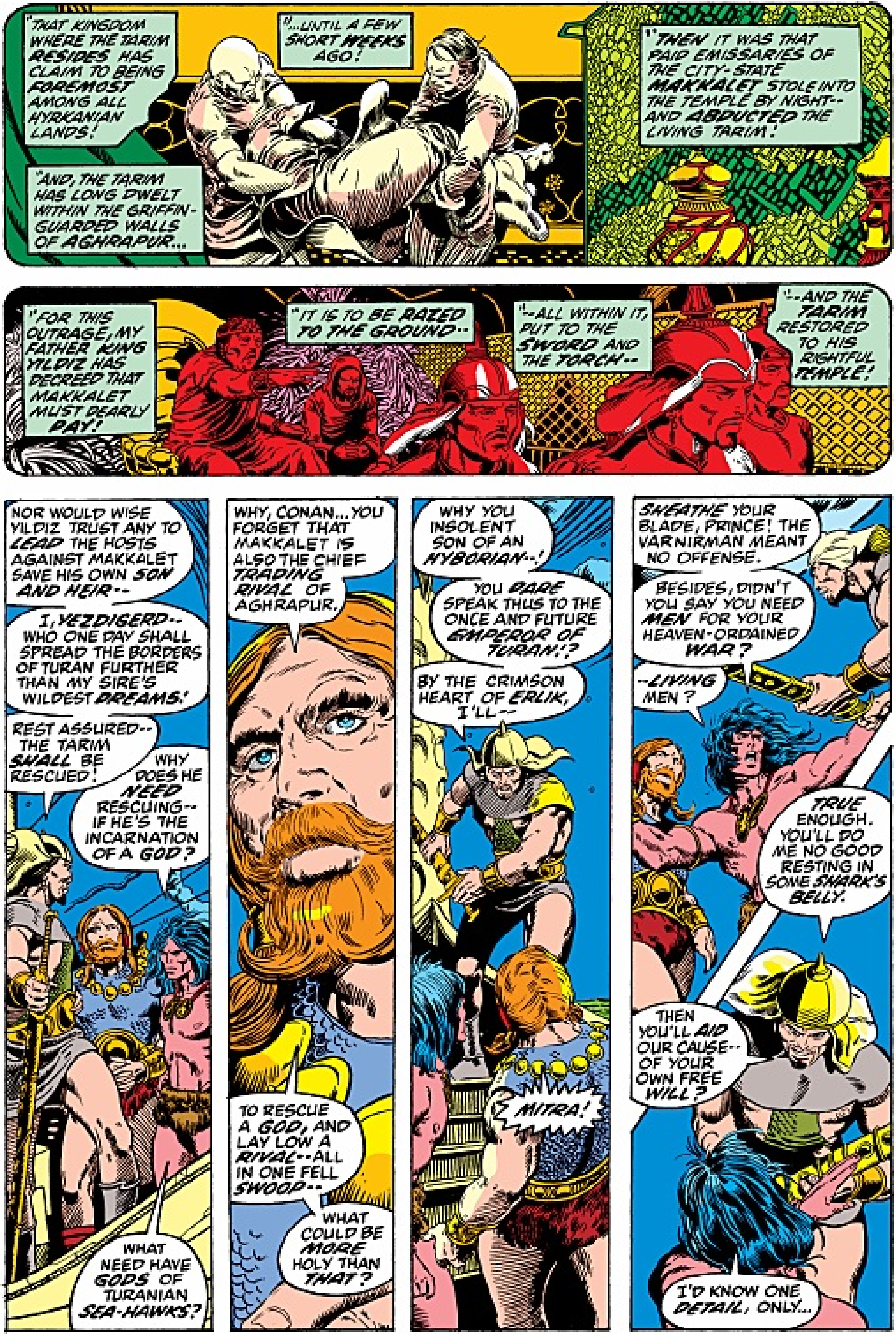

CONAN THE BARBARIAN™
HAWKS FROM THE SEA!
THE VILAYET SEA: SOME MEN SAY IT IS REALLY BUT A TURANIAN LAKE, FOR GREAT PURPLE-SAILED WAR-GALLEYS PROWL ITS WATERY VASTNESS NIGHT AND DAY, PROTECTING THE RICH SEA-TRADE WHICH FILLS THE COFFERS OF TURAN'S KING YILDIZ...
BUT THIS DAY, AS THE SUN DIES BRIGHTLY ALONG THE FAR HORIZON, THE PATROLING IS FORGOTTEN... AND A SULLEN, BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN WONDERS WHY...
Stan Lee PRESENTS: * Roy Thomas WRITER/EDITOR and Barry Smith ARTIST * DAN ADKINS, EMBELLISHER JOHN COSTANZA, LETTERER * CONTINUING THE ADVENTURES OF THE HERO CREATED BY Robert E. Howard

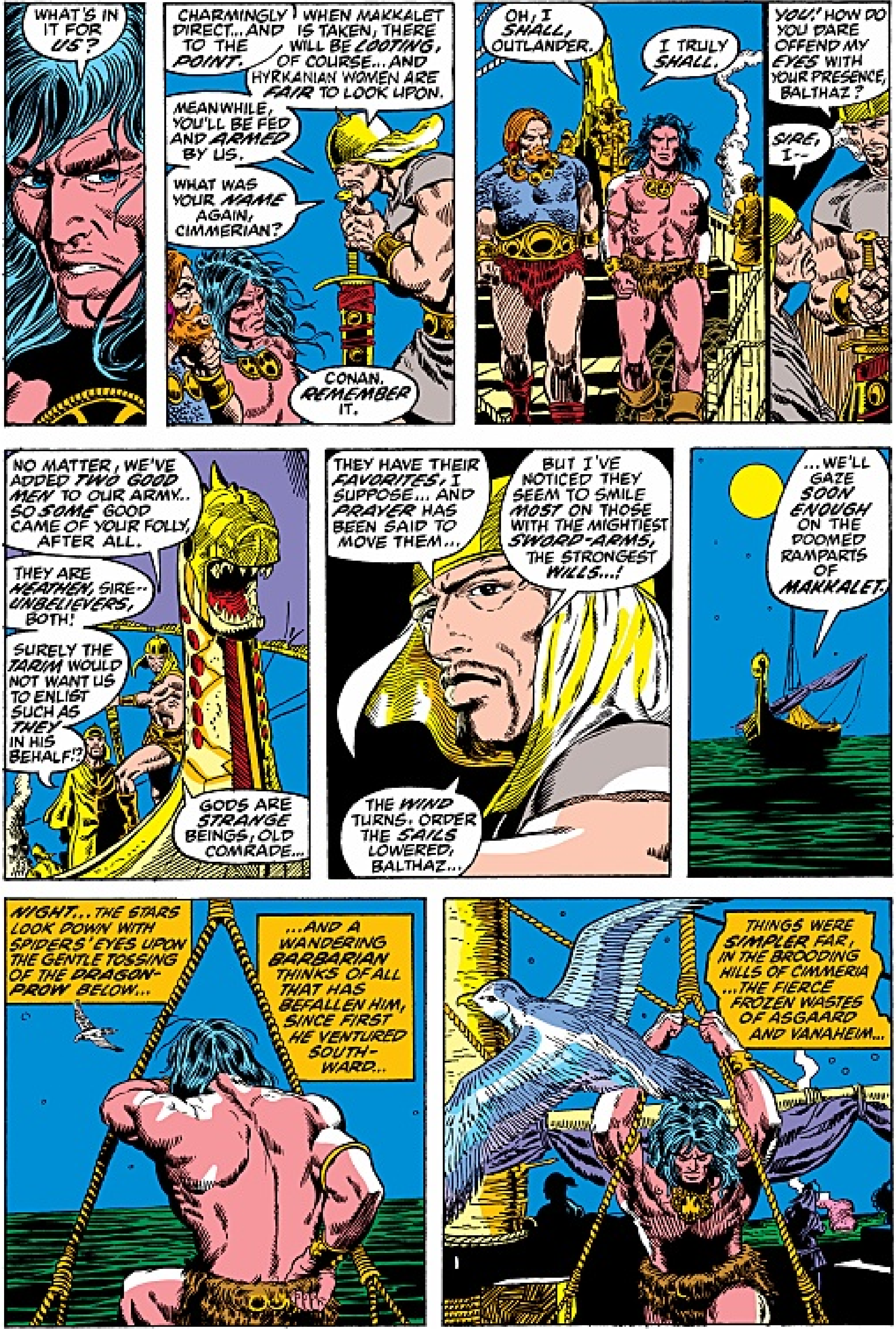

...AS AN ANCIENT IMAGE, CARVED OF LACQUERED WOOD, IS HAULED UP FROM BELOW-DECKS...
...AND LASHED TO THE MAIN MAST, BY MEN GROWN STRANGELY STILL AND REVERENT.
AH, OUTLANDER... I SEE YOU ARE IGNORANT OF THE TRUE KEEPER OF THE WAY...
...OF TARIM, THE MAN WHO BECAME A GOD...
...AND WHOSE GRAVEN IMAGE STILL INSPIRES ALL OF HYRKANIAN DESCENT.
HE DOESN'T DO MUCH FOR ME, SOLDIER.
TARIM INSPIRES ALL, BARBARIAN.
IT IS HIS HOLY WAR WE NOW GO TO FIGHT--
--WE, AND YOU WITH US!
THEN MAYBE I WON'T FIGHT, AFTER ALL.
WHY RISK MY LIFE FOR A PIECE OF PAINTED WOOD?
YOU SHALL RISK YOUR LIFE FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF TARIM, MY FRIEND...
...WHILE YOU'VE STILL A LIFE TO LOSE!
CROM!
HARD TO SEE WITH BLOOD IN YOUR EYES, EH, SAVAGE?
WELL, NO NEED TO SEE. JUST KNEEL, AND BEG FORGIVENESS OF TARIM FOR--
FOR NOTHING, YOU CAT-EYED FOOL!
IT'S YOU WHO SHOULD RATHER BEG FORGIVENESS OF ME--
--IF IT WEREN'T ALREADY TOO LATE FOR THAT!

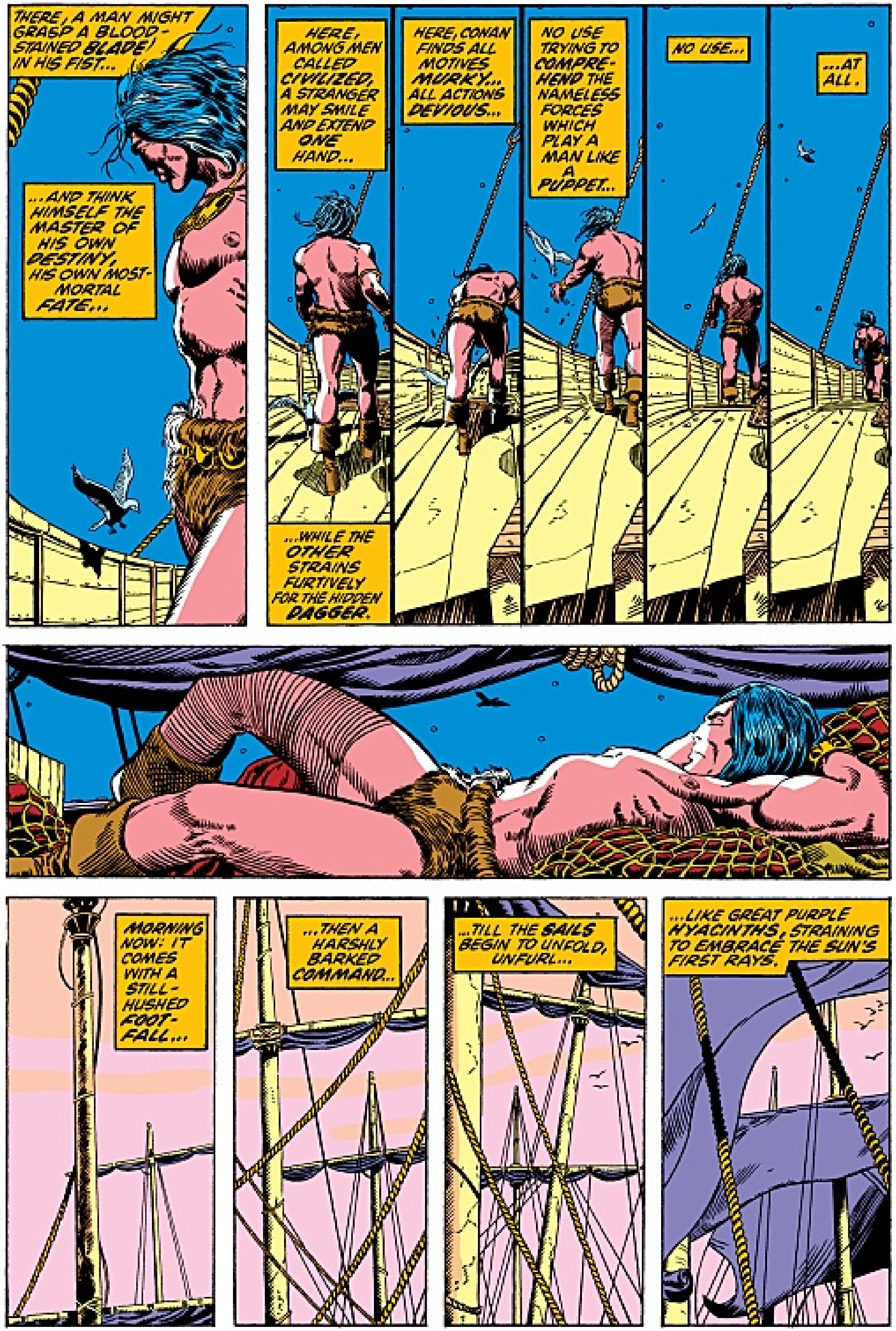

MY GOD CROM GIVES ME NO HELP-- SAVE THE COURAGE HE INSTILLED IN ME AT BIRTH.
LET'S SEE IF YOUR WOODEN GOD SERVES YOU ANY BETTER.
FOR SOME THINGS, BALTHAZ NEEDS NO HELP!
YOU SPEAK AS ELOQUENTLY AS THE HISSING SERPENT!
BUT, THE FLAT END OF YOUR OWN SPEAR IS ENOUGH TO STILL YOUR FORKED TONGUE!
AND, BY MITRA...
I DON'T THINK I'LL EVEN FOUL ITS POINT WITH YOUR BLOOD...
GNNGH
NOT WHILE THERE ARE...BETTER WAYS!
NOW COME, FELLOW...
LET'S SEE HOW WELL YOUR GOD HEEDS YOU...
...WHEN YOU CALL TO HIM WITH SALT WATER IN YOUR GULLET!
WOOOS
CRY LOUDER, MAN--AYE, AND FASTER, TOO--
--SO YOUR PRECIOUS TREE-GOD HEARS YOU BEFORE THAT SHARK DOES!
TARIM-- TARIM, SAVE ME--!!
NOW, O PRINCE?
NOW!

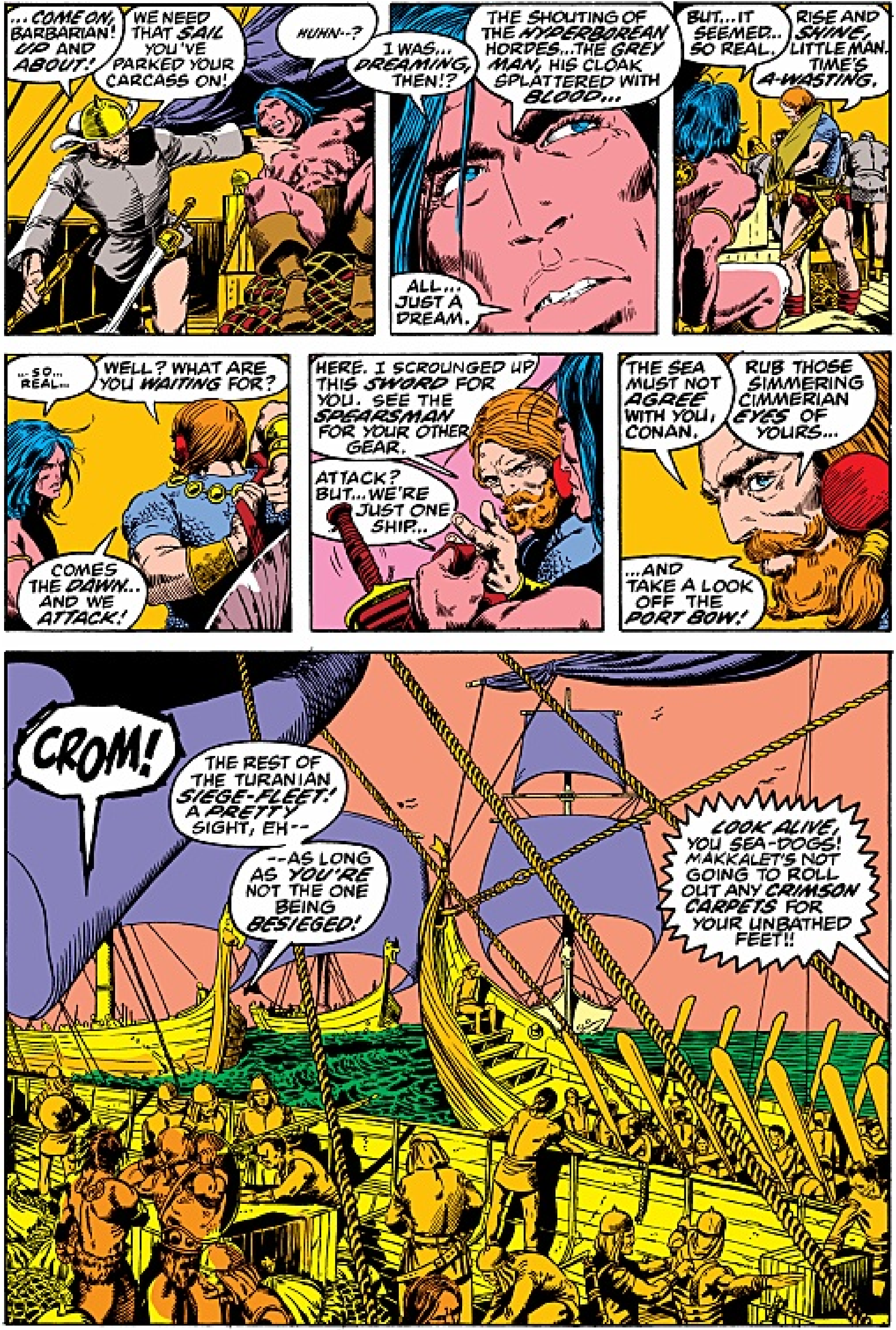

THERE! LET THAT FINNED DEVIL HAVE THOSE ARROWS FOR HIS SUPPER!
OH YES-- AND TOSS A LINE TO BALTHAZ, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.
NOW, FAFNIR...WHAT WAS YOUR BEARDLESS FRIEND'S NAME, AGAIN?
WHY, IT'S--
I AM CONAN.
I'M A CIMMERIAN... AND I CAN TALK.
THEN YOU'D BE WELL ADVISED TO DO SO RESPECTFULLY, SWORD-BROTHER...
FOR YOU KNOW WELL THAT THIS IS YEZDIGERD, PRINCE OF ALL TURAN...
AND I MUST ASK YOU NOT TO DEPLETE THE RANKS OF MY SOLDIERY WITH PERSONAL QUARRELS.
IT'S YOUR SHIP.
YOU'LL DO WELL TO REMEMBER THAT, MAN...
FOR THERE ARE MORE SHARKS IN THESE WATERS THAN ONE ONLY!
NOW, IF YOU'LL PLEASE COME WITH ME...
I WOULD HAVE WORDS WITH OUR GREAT BRONZED GUESTS FROM OUT OF THE MYSTERY-SHROUDED NORTH.
ARE YOU COMING, CONAN?
YES... I'M COMING...!
PAINTED WOOD!
BALTHAZ--THAT MAN SHAMED YOU, IN FRONT OF OUR PRINCE. SHALL I--?
STAY YOUR SHAFT, ARCHER! I'LL WAIT MY CHANCE...
AND IT WILL SURELY COME!

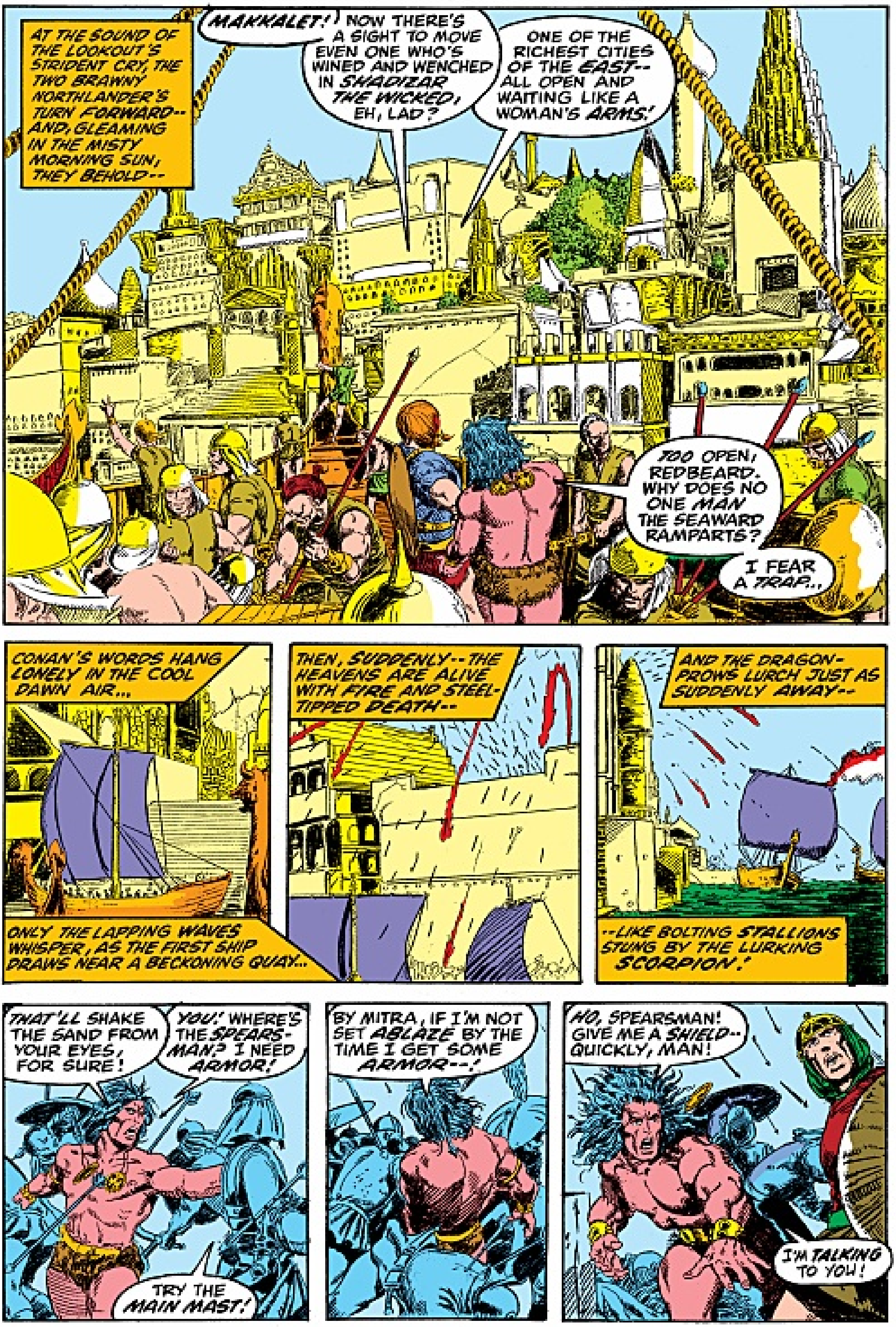

I'LL NOT MINCE WORDS, NORTHLANDERS. WE ARE EASTWARD BOUND, TO FIGHT A GREAT AND HOLY WAR...
AND, THOUGH MY WAR-FLEET SHOULD REJOIN US BY THE MORROW, I CAN STILL USE EVERY FIGHTING-MAN I CAN FIND.
WILL YOU TWO EMBRACE OUR CAUSE?
AS CASTAWAYS YOU'VE HAULED ABOARD, WE'VE LITTLE CHOICE, PRINCE.
BUT--COULDN'T YOU TELL US WHO YOU'RE FIGHTING--AND WHY?
OH, YES--THE DETAILS. QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY..
"IT WAS LONG YEARS AGO, SAY OUR PRIESTS...
"...THAT THE SEA-GODS OF ANCIENT LEMURIA WAXED ANGRY...
"...AND REACHED UP SEA-WEED-LADEN HANDS TO PULL ALL THE ISLANDS OF LEMURIA DOWN TO THEIR HEAVING BOSOMS...
"A LEADER ROSE UP AMID THE CATACLYSM--THE MAN CALLED TARIM--!
"HE STILLED HIS TRIBESMEN'S PANIC, AND DIRECTED THEM TO FLEE--
--INTO THE VERY SEA THEY FEARED!
"HE WAS A MYSTIC--A SEER, WHO HEELED THE SICK AND THE LAME--
"...AND WHO UNERRINGLY LED HIS PEOPLE WESTWARD ACROSS THE SEA...
"WESTWARD--TOWARD THE SETTING SUN...
"...TILL THEY SETTLED ON WHAT IS NOW THE EASTERN SHORE OF THE VILAYET, AND BECAME KNOWN AS... HYRKANIANS.
"LATER STILL, SOME OF MY NEARER ANCESTORS CROSSED EVEN THAT INLAND SEA...
"...AND FOUNDED AGHRAPUR, CAPITAL OF THE KINGDOM NOW CALLED...TURAN!
"BUT, THERE IS NO HYRKANIAN, ON EITHER SIDE OF THE VILAYET, WHO PAYS NOT HOMAGE TO TARIM!
"HE LIVES ON, CENTURY AFTER CENTURY, IN THE PERSON OF HIS DESCENPENTS...
"...EACH OF WHOM IS DECLARED TO BE TARIM INCARNATE!

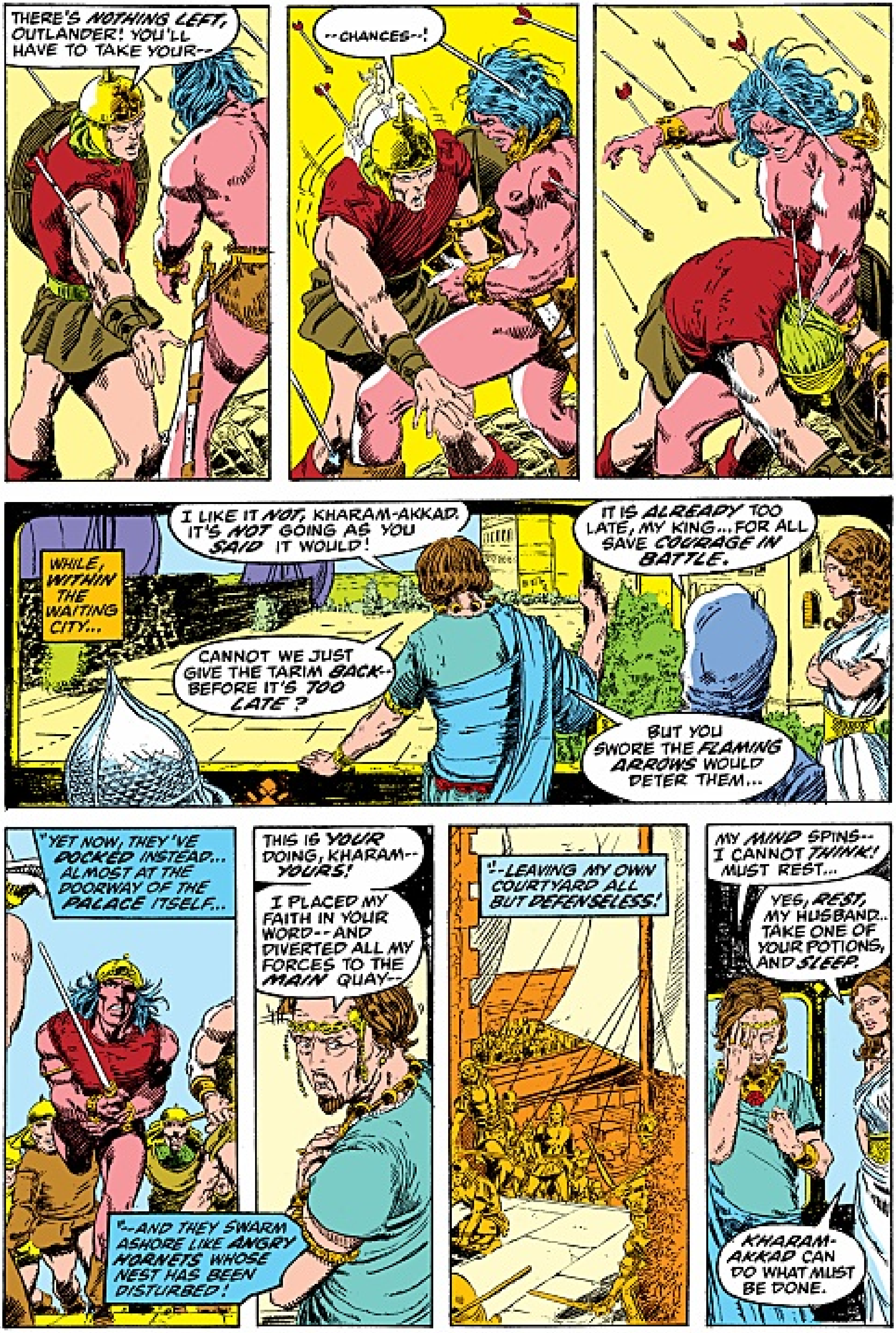

"THAT KINGDOM WHERE THE TARIM RESIDES HAS CLAIM TO BEING FOREMOST AMONG ALL HYRKANIAN LANDS!
"AND, THE TARIM HAS LONG DWELT WITHIN THE GRIFFIN-GUARDED WALLS OF AGHRAPUR...
"...UNTIL A FEW SHORT WEEKS AGO!
"THEN IT WAS THAT PAID EMISSARIES OF THE CITY-STATE MAKKALET STOLE INTO THE TEMPLE BY NIGHT--AND ABDUCTED THE LIVING TARIM!
"FOR THIS OUTRAGE, MY FATHER KING YILDIZ HAS DECREED THAT MAKKALET MUST DEARLY PAY!
"IT IS TO BE RAZED TO THE GROUND--
"--ALL WITHIN IT, PUT TO THE SWORD AND THE TORCH--
"--AND THE TARIM RESTORED TO HIS RIGHTFUL TEMPLE!
NOR WOULD WISE YILDIZ TRUST ANY TO LEAD THE HOSTS AGAINST MAKKALET SAVE HIS OWN SON AND HEIR--
I, YEZDIGERD--WHO ONE DAY SHALL SPREAD THE BORDERS OF TURAN FURTHER THAN MY SIRE'S WILDEST DREAMS!
REST ASSURED--THE TARIM SHALL BE RESCUED!
WHY DOES HE NEED RESCUING--IF HE'S THE INCARNATION OF A GOD?
WHAT NEED HAVE GODS OF TURANIAN SEA-HAWKS?
WHY, CONAN...YOU FORGET THAT MAKKALET IS ALSO THE CHIEF TRADING RIVAL OF AGHRAPUR.
TO RESCUE A GOD, AND LAY LOW A RIVAL--ALL IN ONE FELL SWOOP--
WHAT COULD BE MORE HOLY THAN THAT?
WHY YOU INSOLENT SON OF AN HYBORIAN--!
YOU DARE SPEAK THUS TO THE ONCE AND FUTURE EMPEROR OF TURAN!?
BY THE CRIMSON HEART OF ERLIK, I'LL--
MITRA!
SHEATHE YOUR BLADE, PRINCE! THE VARNIRMAN MEANT NO OFFENSE.
BESIDES, DIDN'T YOU SAY YOU NEED MEN FOR YOUR HEAVEN-ORDAINED WAR?
--LIVING MEN?
TRUE ENOUGH. YOU'LL DO ME NO GOOD RESTING IN SOME SHARK'S BELLY.
THEN YOU'LL AID OUR CAUSE--OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL?
I'D KNOW ONE DETAIL, ONLY...

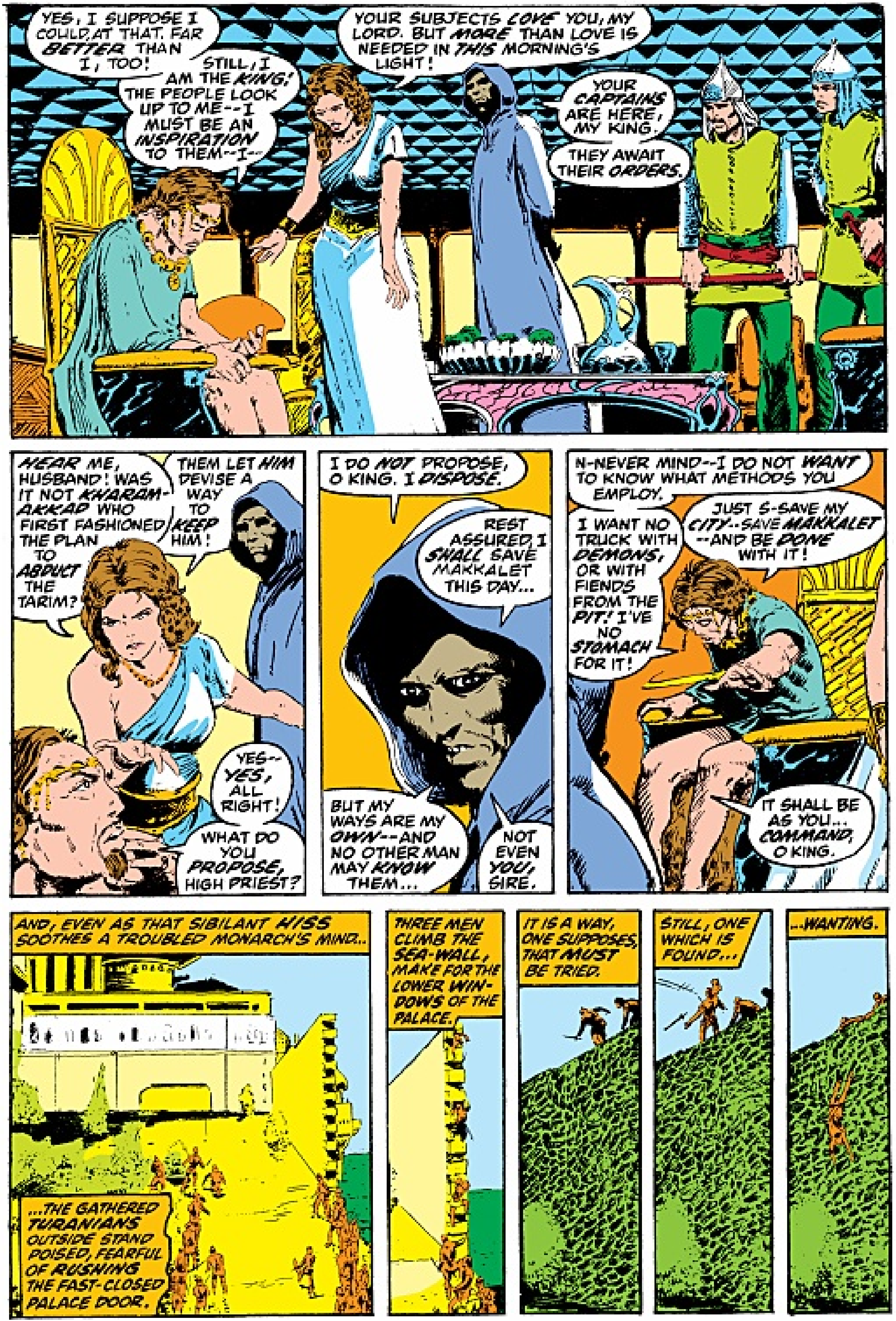

WHAT'S IN IT FOR *US*?
CHARMINGLY DIRECT...AND TO THE *POINT*.
WHEN MAKKALET IS TAKEN, THERE WILL BE *LOOTING*, OF COURSE...AND HYRKANIAN WOMEN ARE *FAIR* TO LOOK UPON.
MEANWHILE, YOU'LL BE FED AND *ARMED* BY US.
WHAT WAS YOUR *NAME* AGAIN, CIMMERIAN?
CONAN. *REMEMBER* IT.
OH, I *SHALL*, OUTLANDER.
I TRULY *SHALL*.
YOU! HOW DO YOU DARE OFFEND MY *EYES* WITH YOUR PRESENCE, BALTHAZ?
SIRE, I--
NO MATTER, WE'VE ADDED *TWO GOOD MEN* TO OUR ARMY.. SO *SOME* GOOD CAME OF YOUR FOLLY, AFTER ALL.
THEY ARE *HEATHEN*, SIRE-- *UNBELIEVERS*, BOTH!
SURELY THE *TARIM* WOULD NOT WANT US TO ENLIST SUCH AS *THEY* IN HIS BEHALF!?
GODS ARE *STRANGE* BEINGS, OLD COMRADE...
THEY HAVE THEIR *FAVORITES*, I SUPPOSE... AND *PRAYER* HAS BEEN SAID TO MOVE THEM...
BUT I'VE NOTICED THEY SEEM TO SMILE *MOST* ON THOSE WITH THE MIGHTIEST *SWORD-ARMS*, THE STRONGEST *WILLS*...!
THE *WIND* TURNS. ORDER THE *SAILS* LOWERED, BALTHAZ...
...WE'LL GAZE *SOON ENOUGH* ON THE DOOMED RAMPARTS OF *MAKKALET*.
NIGHT... THE STARS LOOK DOWN WITH SPIDERS' EYES UPON THE GENTLE TOSSING OF THE DRAGON-PROW BELOW...
...AND A WANDERING BARBARIAN THINKS OF ALL THAT HAS BEFALLEN HIM, SINCE FIRST HE VENTURED SOUTHWARD...
THINGS WERE SIMPLER FAR, IN THE BROODING HILLS OF CIMMERIA ...THE FIERCE FROZEN WASTES OF ASGAARD AND VANAHEIM...

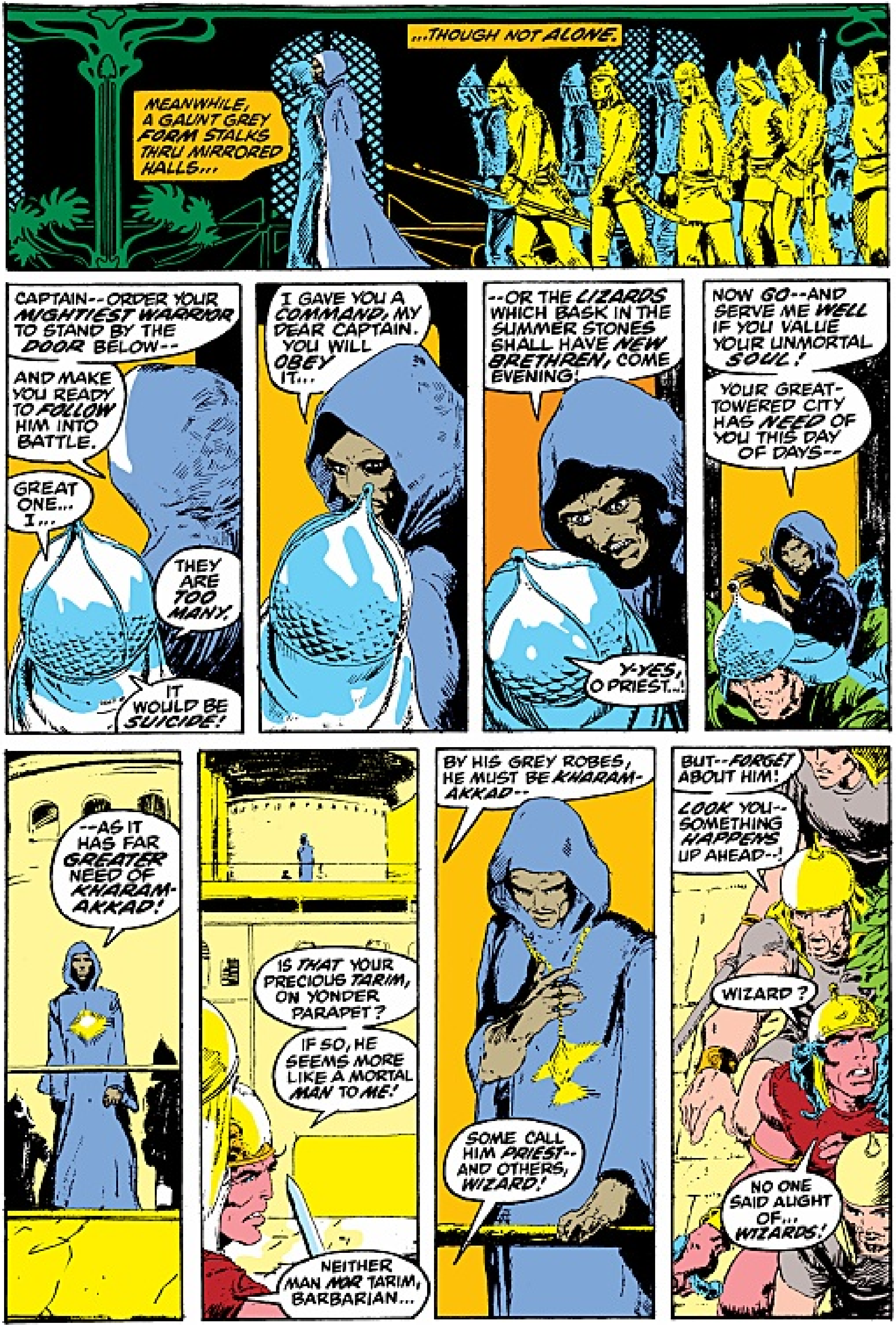

THERE, A MAN MIGHT GRASP A BLOOD-STAINED BLADE IN HIS FIST...
...AND THINK HIMSELF THE MASTER OF HIS OWN DESTINY, HIS OWN MOST-MORTAL FATE...
HERE, AMONG MEN CALLED CIVILIZED, A STRANGER MAY SMILE AND EXTEND ONE HAND...
...WHILE THE OTHER STRAINS FURTIVELY FOR THE HIDDEN DAGGER.
HERE, CONAN FINDS ALL MOTIVES MURKY... ALL ACTIONS DEVIOUS...
NO USE TRYING TO COMPREHEND THE NAMELESS FORCES WHICH PLAY A MAN LIKE A PUPPET...
NO USE...
...AT ALL.
MORNING NOW: IT COMES WITH A STILL-HUSHED FOOTFALL...
...THEN A HARSHLY BARKED COMMAND...
...TILL THE SAILS BEGIN TO UNFOLD, UNFURL...
...LIKE GREAT PURPLE HYACINTHS, STRAINING TO EMBRACE THE SUN'S FIRST RAYS.

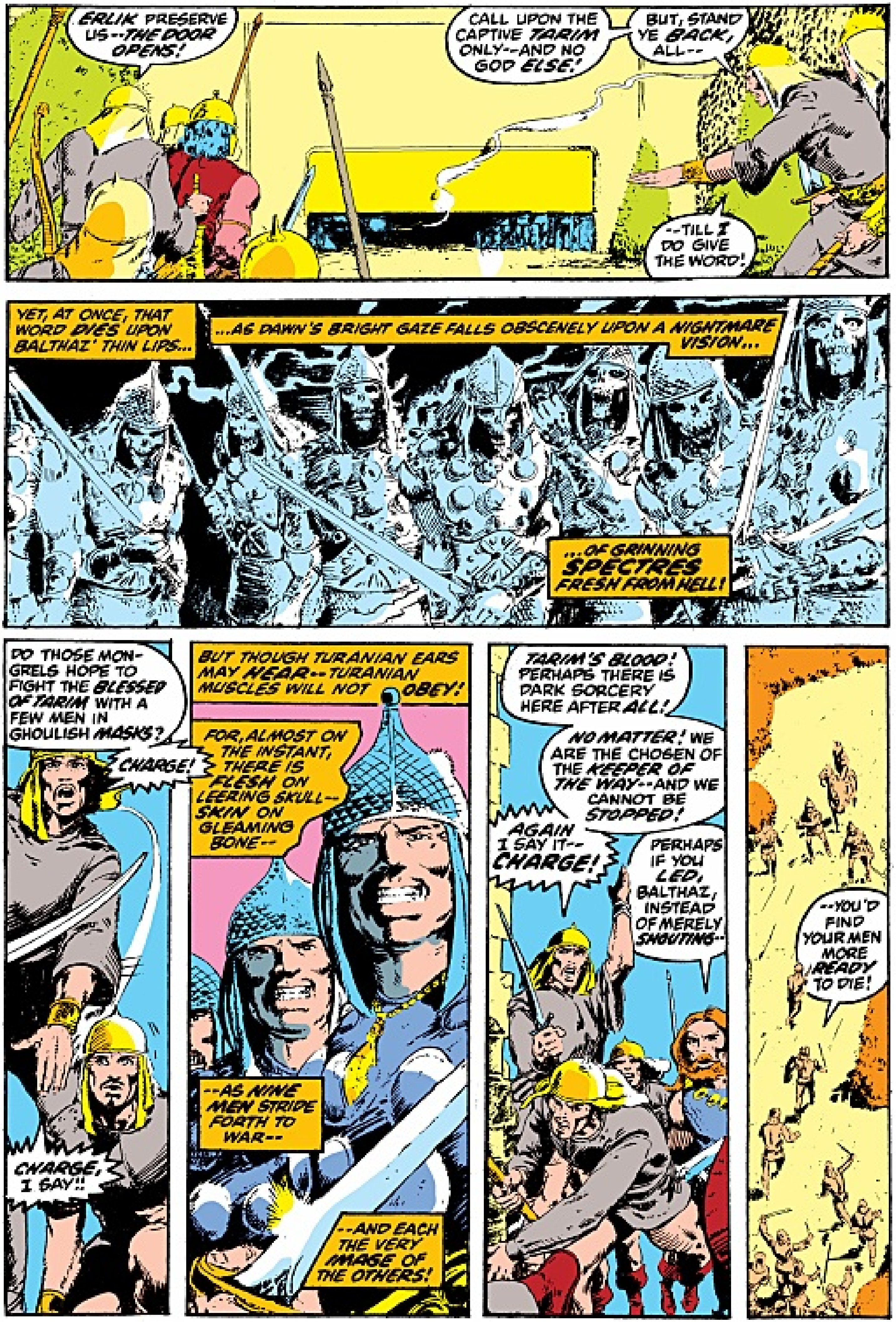

...COME ON, BARBARIAN! UP AND ABOUT!
WE NEED THAT SAIL YOU'VE PARKED YOUR CARCASS ON!
HUNN--?
I WAS... DREAMING, THEN!?
THE SHOUTING OF THE HYPERBOREAN HORDES...THE GREY MAN, HIS CLOAK SPLATTERED WITH BLOOD...
ALL... JUST A DREAM.
BUT...IT SEEMED.. SO REAL.
RISE AND SHINE, LITTLE MAN. TIME'S A-WASTING.
...SO... REAL...
WELL? WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
COMES THE DAWN... AND WE ATTACK!
HERE. I SCROUNGED UP THIS SWORD FOR YOU. SEE THE SPEARSMAN FOR YOUR OTHER GEAR.
ATTACK? BUT...WE'RE JUST ONE SHIP...
THE SEA MUST NOT AGREE WITH YOU, CONAN.
RUB THOSE SIMMERING CIMMERIAN EYES OF YOURS...
...AND TAKE A LOOK OFF THE PORT BOW!
CROM!
THE REST OF THE TURANIAN SIEGE-FLEET! A PRETTY SIGHT, EH--
--AS LONG AS YOU'RE NOT THE ONE BEING BESIEGED!
LOOK ALIVE, YOU SEA-DOGS! MAKKALET'S NOT GOING TO ROLL OUT ANY CRIMSON CARPETS FOR YOUR UNBATHED FEET!!

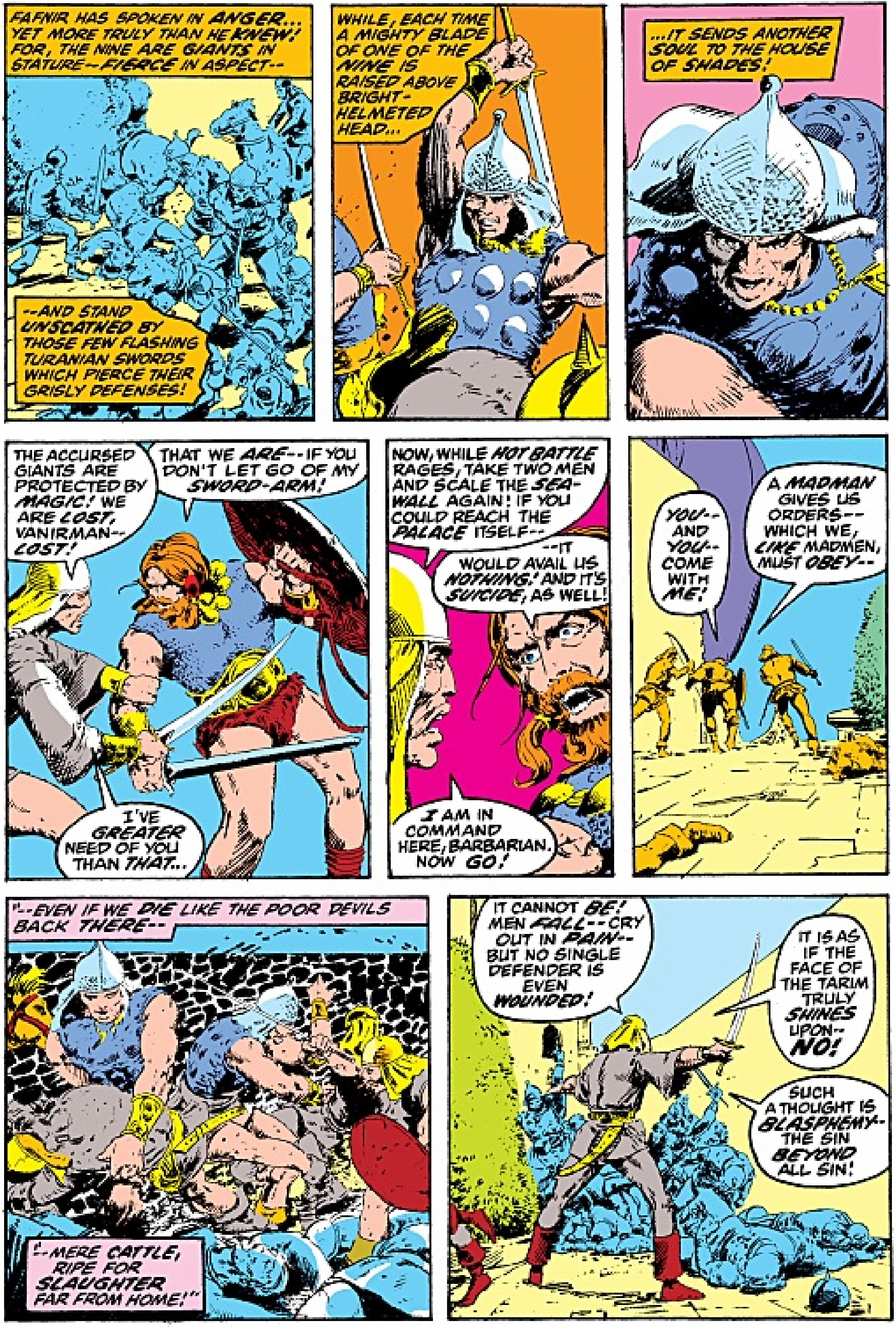

AT THE SOUND OF THE LOOKOUT'S STRIDENT CRY, THE TWO BRAWNY NORTHLANDER'S TURN FORWARD-- AND, GLEAMING IN THE MISTY MORNING SUN, THEY BEHOLD--
MAKKALET!
NOW THERE'S A SIGHT TO MOVE EVEN ONE WHO'S WINED AND WENCHED IN SHADIZAR THE WICKED, EH, LAD?
ONE OF THE RICHEST CITIES OF THE EAST-- ALL OPEN AND WAITING LIKE A WOMAN'S ARMS!
TOO OPEN, REDBEARD. WHY DOES NO ONE MAN THE SEAWARD RAMPARTS?
I FEAR A TRAP...
CONAN'S WORDS HANG LONELY IN THE COOL DAWN AIR...
ONLY THE LAPPING WAVES WHISPER, AS THE FIRST SHIP DRAWS NEAR A BECKONING QUAY...
THEN, SUDDENLY--THE HEAVENS ARE ALIVE WITH FIRE AND STEEL-TIPPED DEATH--
AND THE DRAGON-PROWS LURCH JUST AS SUDDENLY AWAY--
--LIKE BOLTING STALLIONS STUNG BY THE LURKING SCORPION!
THAT'LL SHAKE THE SAND FROM YOUR EYES, FOR SURE!
YOU! WHERE'S THE SPEARSMAN? I NEED ARMOR!
TRY THE MAIN MAST!
BY MITRA, IF I'M NOT SET ABLAZE BY THE TIME I GET SOME ARMOR--!
HO, SPEARSMAN! GIVE ME A SHIELD-- QUICKLY, MAN!
I'M TALKING TO YOU!

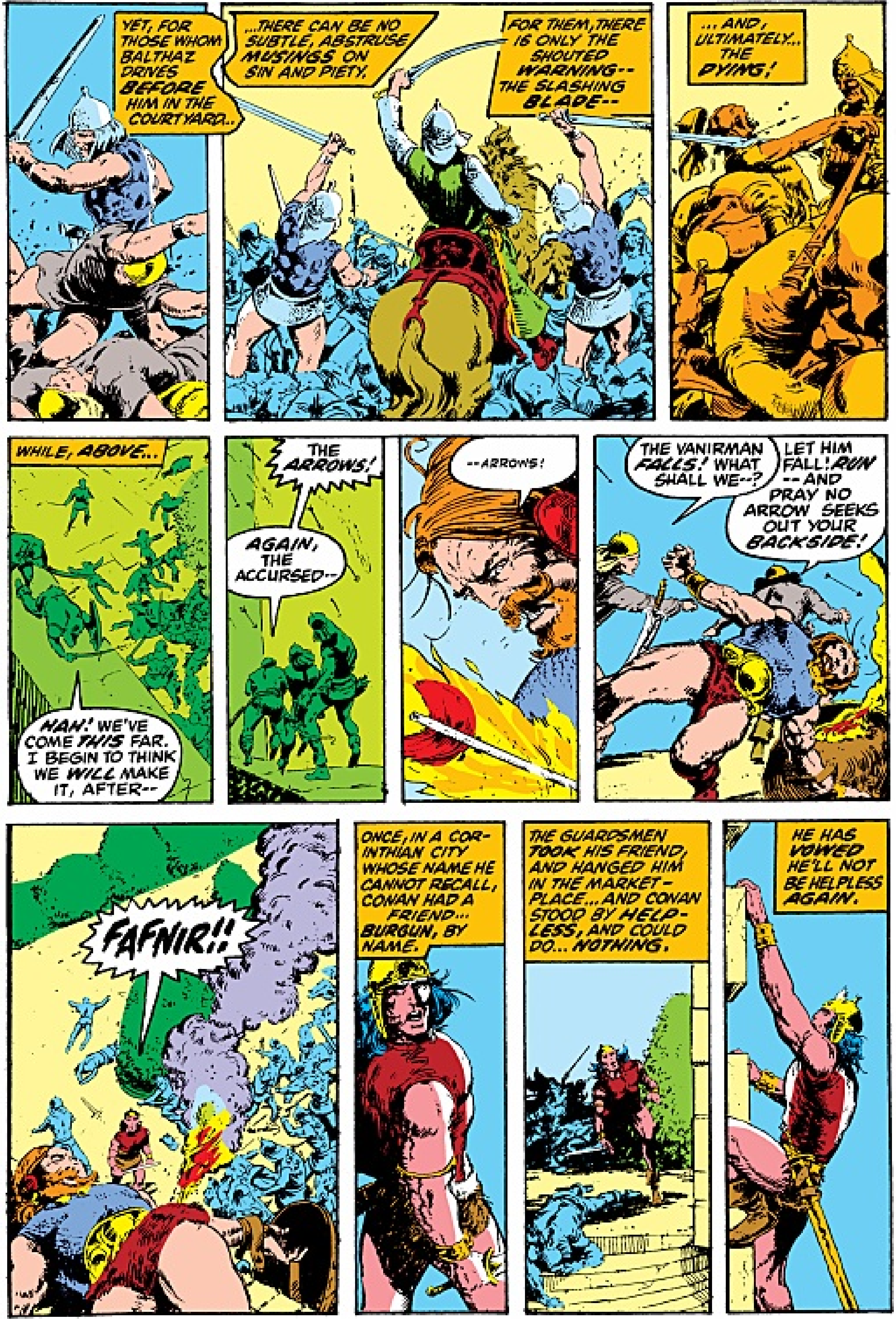

THERE'S NOTHING LEFT, OUTLANDER! YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE YOUR--
--CHANCES--!
WHILE, WITHIN THE WAITING CITY...
I LIKE IT NOT, KHARAM-AKKAD. IT'S NOT GOING AS YOU SAID IT WOULD!
CANNOT WE JUST GIVE THE TARIM BACK--BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE?
IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE, MY KING...FOR ALL SAVE COURAGE IN BATTLE.
BUT YOU SWORE THE FLAMING ARROWS WOULD DETER THEM...
"YET NOW, THEY'VE DOCKED INSTEAD... ALMOST AT THE DOORWAY OF THE PALACE ITSELF...
"--AND THEY SWARM ASHORE LIKE ANGRY HORNETS WHOSE NEST HAS BEEN DISTURBED!
THIS IS YOUR DOING, KHARAM--YOURS!
I PLACED MY FAITH IN YOUR WORD--AND DIVERTED ALL MY FORCES TO THE MAIN QUAY--
"--LEAVING MY OWN COURTYARD ALL BUT DEFENSELESS!
MY MIND SPINS-- I CANNOT THINK! MUST REST...
YES, REST, MY HUSBAND... TAKE ONE OF YOUR POTIONS, AND SLEEP.
KHARAM-AKKAD CAN DO WHAT MUST BE DONE.

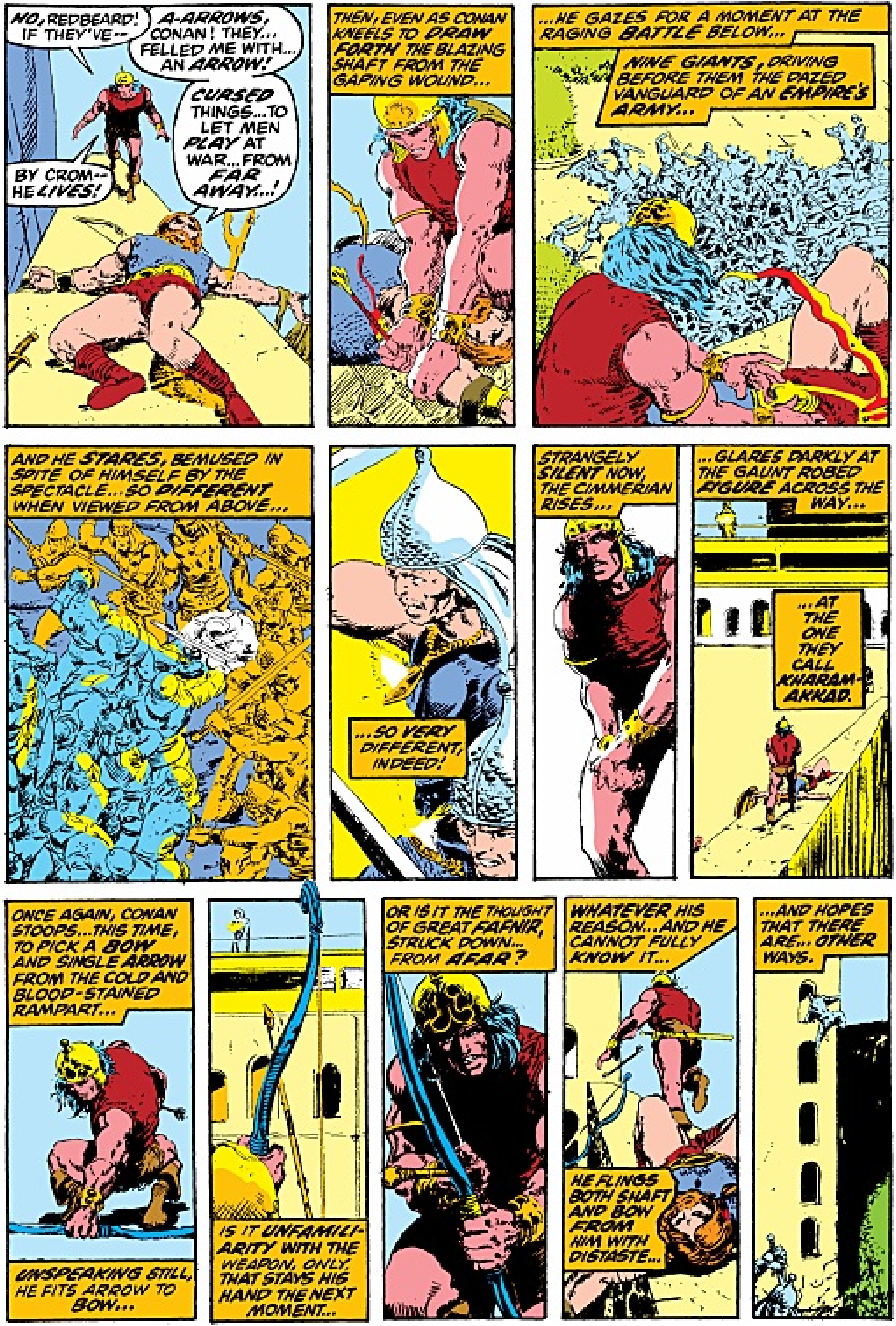

YES, I SUPPOSE I COULD, AT THAT. FAR BETTER THAN I, TOO!
STILL, I AM THE KING! THE PEOPLE LOOK UP TO ME--I MUST BE AN INSPIRATION TO THEM--I--
YOUR SUBJECTS LOVE YOU, MY LORD. BUT MORE THAN LOVE IS NEEDED IN THIS MORNING'S LIGHT!
YOUR CAPTAINS ARE HERE, MY KING.
THEY AWAIT THEIR ORDERS.
HEAR ME, HUSBAND! WAS IT NOT KHARAM-AKKAD WHO FIRST FASHIONED THE PLAN TO ABDUCT THE TARIM?
THEN LET HIM DEVISE A WAY TO KEEP HIM!
YES--YES, ALL RIGHT!
WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE, HIGH PRIEST?
I DO NOT PROPOSE, O KING. I DISPOSE.
REST ASSURED, I SHALL SAVE MAKKALET THIS DAY...
BUT MY WAYS ARE MY OWN--AND NO OTHER MAN MAY KNOW THEM...
NOT EVEN YOU, SIRE.
N-NEVER MIND--I DO NOT WANT TO KNOW WHAT METHODS YOU EMPLOY.
I WANT NO TRUCK WITH DEMONS, OR WITH FIENDS FROM THE PIT! I'VE NO STOMACH FOR IT!
JUST S-SAVE MY CITY--SAVE MAKKALET--AND BE DONE WITH IT!
IT SHALL BE AS YOU... COMMAND, O KING.
AND, EVEN AS THAT SIBILANT HISS SOOTHES A TROUBLED MONARCH'S MIND...
...THE GATHERED TURANIANS OUTSIDE STAND POISED, FEARFUL OF RUSHING THE FAST-CLOSED PALACE DOOR.
THREE MEN CLIMB THE SEA-WALL, MAKE FOR THE LOWER WINDOWS OF THE PALACE.
IT IS A WAY, ONE SUPPOSES, THAT MUST BE TRIED.
STILL, ONE WHICH IS FOUND...
...WANTING.

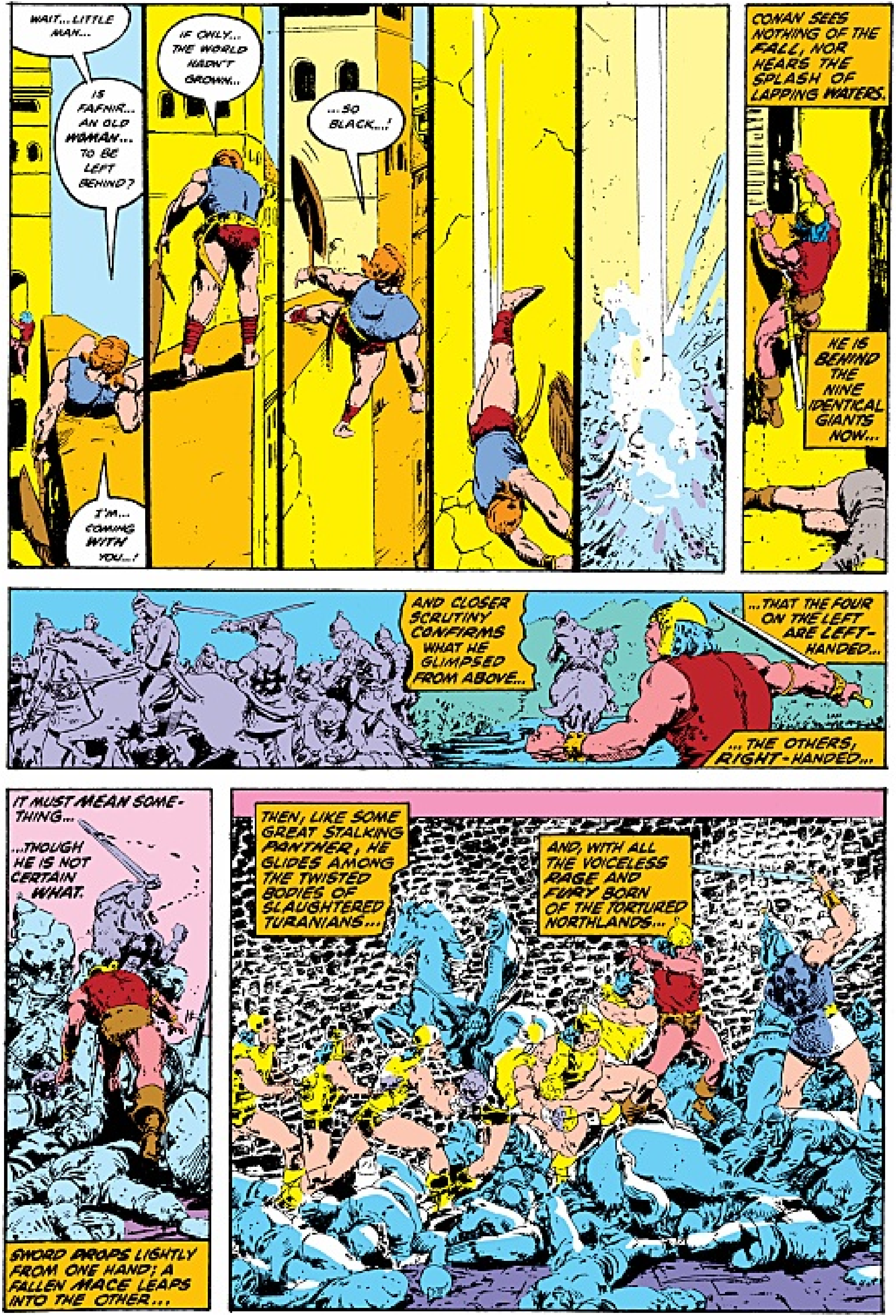

MEANWHILE, A GAUNT GREY FORM STALKS THRU MIRRORED HALLS...
...THOUGH NOT ALONE.
CAPTAIN--ORDER YOUR MIGHTIEST WARRIOR TO STAND BY THE DOOR BELOW--
AND MAKE YOU READY TO FOLLOW HIM INTO BATTLE.
GREAT ONE... I...
THEY ARE TOO MANY.
IT WOULD BE SUICIDE!
I GAVE YOU A COMMAND, MY DEAR CAPTAIN. YOU WILL OBEY IT...
--OR THE LIZARDS WHICH BASK IN THE SUMMER STONES SHALL HAVE NEW BRETHREN, COME EVENING!
Y-YES, O PRIEST...!
NOW GO--AND SERVE ME WELL IF YOU VALUE YOUR UNMORTAL SOUL!
YOUR GREAT-TOWERED CITY HAS NEED OF YOU THIS DAY OF DAYS--
--AS IT HAS FAR GREATER NEED OF KHARAM-AKKAD!
IS THAT YOUR PRECIOUS TARIM, ON YONDER PARAPET?
IF SO, HE SEEMS MORE LIKE A MORTAL MAN TO ME!
NEITHER MAN NOR TARIM, BARBARIAN...
BY HIS GREY ROBES, HE MUST BE KHARAM-AKKAD--
SOME CALL HIM PRIEST--AND OTHERS, WIZARD!
BUT--FORGET ABOUT HIM!
LOOK YOU--SOMETHING HAPPENS UP AHEAD--!
WIZARD?
NO ONE SAID AUGHT OF... WIZARDS!

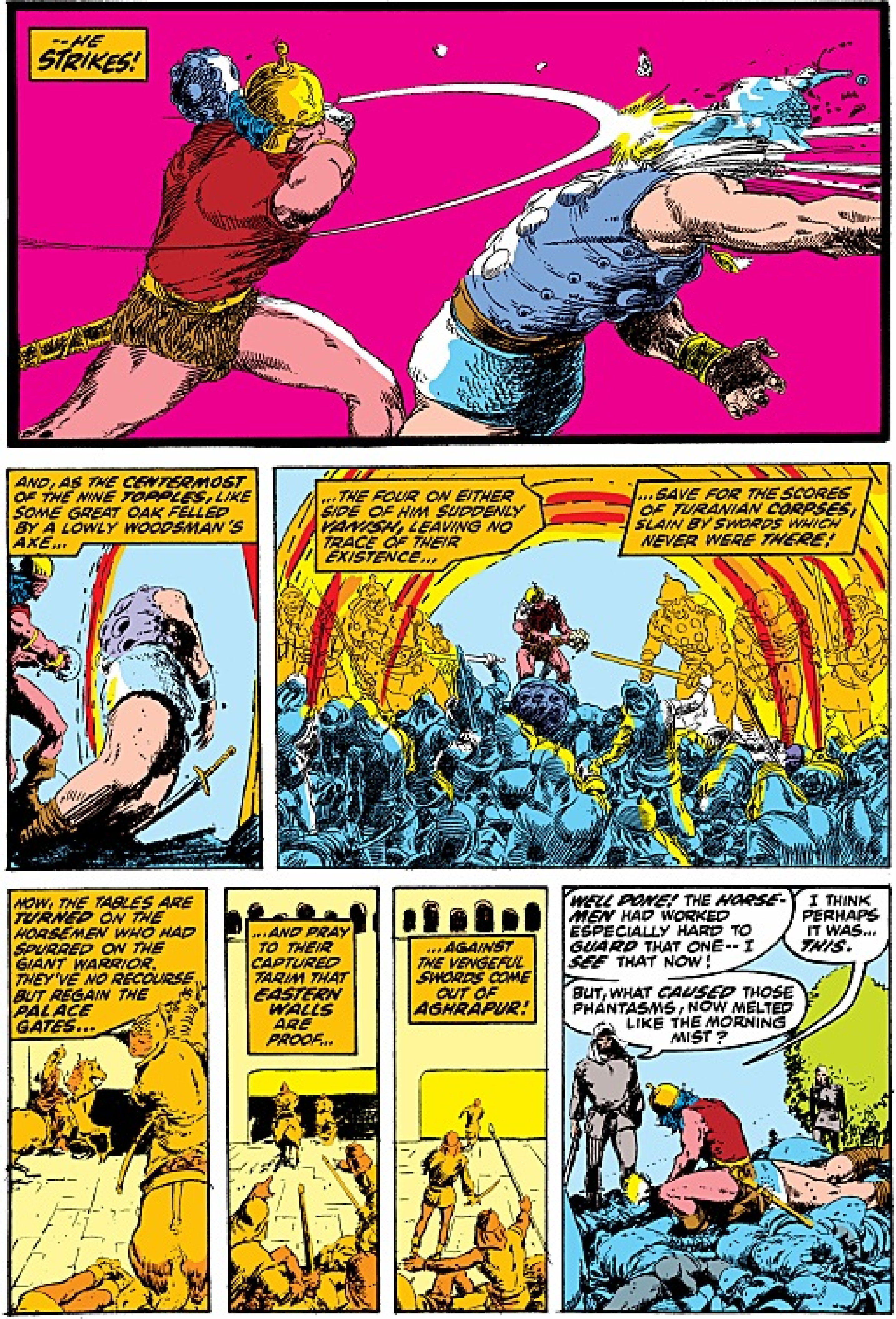

ERLIK PRESERVE US--THE DOOR OPENS!
CALL UPON THE CAPTIVE TARIM ONLY--AND NO GOD ELSE!
BUT, STAND YE BACK, ALL--
--TILL I DO GIVE THE WORD!
YET, AT ONCE, THAT WORD DIES UPON BALTHAZ' THIN LIPS...
...AS DAWN'S BRIGHT GAZE FALLS OBSCENELY UPON A NIGHTMARE VISION...
...OF GRINNING SPECTRES FRESH FROM HELL!
DO THOSE MONGRELS HOPE TO FIGHT THE BLESSED OF TARIM WITH A FEW MEN IN GHOULISH MASKS?
CHARGE!
CHARGE, I SAY!!
BUT THOUGH TURANIAN EARS MAY HEAR--TURANIAN MUSCLES WILL NOT OBEY!
FOR, ALMOST ON THE INSTANT, THERE IS FLESH ON LEERING SKULL--SKIN ON GLEAMING BONE--
--AS NINE MEN STRIDE FORTH TO WAR--
--AND EACH THE VERY IMAGE OF THE OTHERS!
TARIM'S BLOOD! PERHAPS THERE IS DARK SORCERY HERE AFTER ALL!
NO MATTER! WE ARE THE CHOSEN OF THE KEEPER OF THE WAY--AND WE CANNOT BE STOPPED!
AGAIN I SAY IT--CHARGE!
PERHAPS IF YOU LED, BALTHAZ, INSTEAD OF MERELY SHOUTING--
--YOU'D FIND YOUR MEN MORE READY TO DIE!

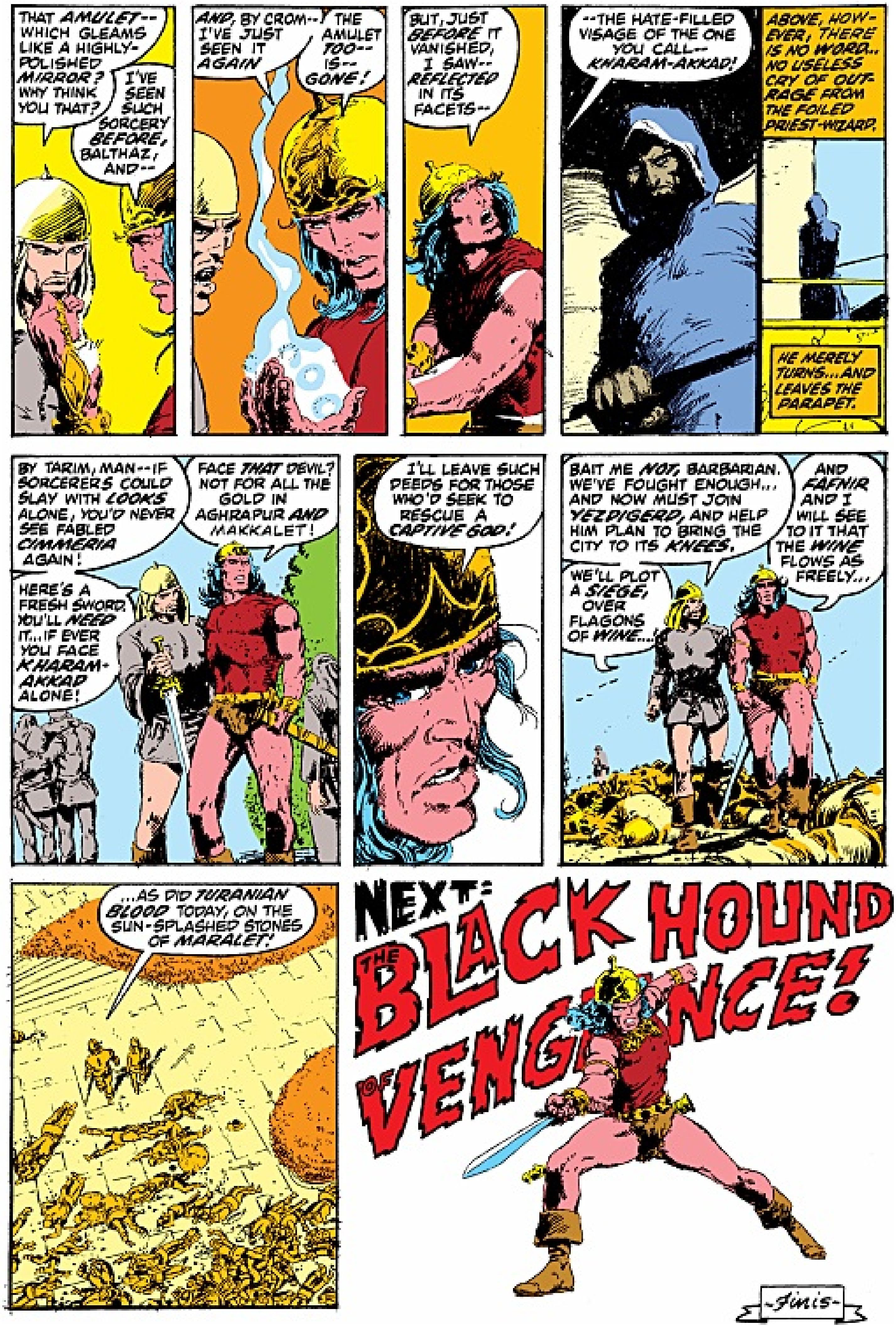

FAFNIR HAS SPOKEN IN ANGER... YET MORE TRULY THAN HE KNEW! FOR, THE NINE ARE GIANTS IN STATURE--FIERCE IN ASPECT--
--AND STAND UNSCATHED BY THOSE FEW FLASHING TURANIAN SWORDS WHICH PIERCE THEIR GRISLY DEFENSES!
WHILE, EACH TIME A MIGHTY BLADE OF ONE OF THE NINE IS RAISED ABOVE BRIGHT-HELMETED HEAD...
...IT SENDS ANOTHER SOUL TO THE HOUSE OF SHADES!
THE ACCURSED GIANTS ARE PROTECTED BY MAGIC! WE ARE LOST, VANIRMAN--LOST!
THAT WE ARE--IF YOU DON'T LET GO OF MY SWORD-ARM!
I'VE GREATER NEED OF YOU THAN THAT...
NOW, WHILE HOT BATTLE RAGES, TAKE TWO MEN AND SCALE THE SEA-WALL AGAIN! IF YOU COULD REACH THE PALACE ITSELF--
--IT WOULD AVAIL US NOTHING! AND IT'S SUICIDE, AS WELL!
I AM IN COMMAND HERE, BARBARIAN. NOW GO!
A MADMAN GIVES US ORDERS--WHICH WE, LIKE MADMEN, MUST OBEY--
YOU--AND YOU--COME WITH ME!
"--EVEN IF WE DIE LIKE THE POOR DEVILS BACK THERE--
"--MERE CATTLE, RIPE FOR SLAUGHTER FAR FROM HOME!"
IT CANNOT BE! MEN FALL--CRY OUT IN PAIN--BUT NO SINGLE DEFENDER IS EVEN WOUNDED!
IT IS AS IF THE FACE OF THE TARIM TRULY SHINES UPON--NO!
SUCH A THOUGHT IS BLASPHEMY--THE SIN BEYOND ALL SIN!


YET, FOR THOSE WHOM BALTHAZ DRIVES BEFORE HIM IN THE COURTYARD..
...THERE CAN BE NO SUBTLE, ABSTRUSE MUSINGS ON SIN AND PIETY.
FOR THEM, THERE IS ONLY THE SHOUTED WARNING-- THE SLASHING BLADE--
...AND, ULTIMATELY... THE DYING!
WHILE, ABOVE...
NAH! WE'VE COME THIS FAR. I BEGIN TO THINK WE WILL MAKE IT, AFTER--
THE ARROWS!
AGAIN, THE ACCURSED--
--ARROWS!
THE VANIRMAN FALLS! WHAT SHALL WE--?
LET HIM FALL! RUN --AND PRAY NO ARROW SEEKS OUT YOUR BACKSIDE!
FAFNIR!!
ONCE, IN A CORINTHIAN CITY WHOSE NAME HE CANNOT RECALL, CONAN HAD A FRIEND... BURGUN, BY NAME.
THE GUARDSMEN TOOK HIS FRIEND, AND HANGED HIM IN THE MARKET-PLACE... AND CONAN STOOD BY HELPLESS, AND COULD DO... NOTHING.
HE HAS VOWED HE'LL NOT BE HELPLESS AGAIN.


NO, REDBEARD! IF THEY'VE--
A-ARROWS, CONAN! THEY... FELLED ME WITH... AN ARROW!
CURSED THINGS...TO LET MEN PLAY AT WAR...FROM FAR AWAY...!
BY CROM-- HE LIVES!
THEN, EVEN AS CONAN KNEELS TO DRAW FORTH THE BLAZING SHAFT FROM THE GAPING WOUND...
...HE GAZES FOR A MOMENT AT THE RAGING BATTLE BELOW...
NINE GIANTS, DRIVING BEFORE THEM THE DAZED VANGUARD OF AN EMPIRE'S ARMY...
AND HE STARES, BEMUSED IN SPITE OF HIMSELF BY THE SPECTACLE...SO DIFFERENT WHEN VIEWED FROM ABOVE...
...SO VERY DIFFERENT, INDEED!
STRANGELY SILENT NOW, THE CIMMERIAN RISES...
...GLARES DARKLY AT THE GAUNT ROBED FIGURE ACROSS THE WAY...
...AT THE ONE THEY CALL KHARAM-AKKAD.
ONCE AGAIN, CONAN STOOPS...THIS TIME, TO PICK A BOW AND SINGLE ARROW FROM THE COLD AND BLOOD-STAINED RAMPART...
UNSPEAKING STILL, HE FITS ARROW TO BOW...
IS IT UNFAMILIARITY WITH THE WEAPON, ONLY, THAT STAYS HIS HAND THE NEXT MOMENT...
OR IS IT THE THOUGHT OF GREAT FAFNIR, STRUCK DOWN... FROM AFAR?
WHATEVER HIS REASON...AND HE CANNOT FULLY KNOW IT...
HE FLINGS BOTH SHAFT AND BOW FROM HIM WITH DISTASTE...
...AND HOPES THAT THERE ARE... OTHER WAYS.


WAIT... LITTLE MAN...
IS FAFNIR... AN OLD WOMAN... TO BE LEFT BEHIND?
I'M... COMING WITH YOU...!
IF ONLY... THE WORLD HADN'T GROWN...
...SO BLACK...!
CONAN SEES NOTHING OF THE FALL, NOR HEARS THE SPLASH OF LAPPING WATERS.
HE IS BEHIND THE NINE IDENTICAL GIANTS NOW...
AND CLOSER SCRUTINY CONFIRMS WHAT HE GLIMPSED FROM ABOVE...
...THAT THE FOUR ON THE LEFT ARE LEFT-HANDED...
...THE OTHERS, RIGHT-HANDED...
IT MUST MEAN SOMETHING...
...THOUGH HE IS NOT CERTAIN WHAT.
SWORD DROPS LIGHTLY FROM ONE HAND; A FALLEN MACE LEAPS INTO THE OTHER...
THEN, LIKE SOME GREAT STALKING PANTHER, HE GLIDES AMONG THE TWISTED BODIES OF SLAUGHTERED TURANIANS...
AND, WITH ALL THE VOICELESS RAGE AND FURY BORN OF THE TORTURED NORTHLANDS...


--HE STRIKES!
AND, AS THE CENTERMOST OF THE NINE TOPPLES, LIKE SOME GREAT OAK FELLED BY A LOWLY WOODSMAN'S AXE...
...THE FOUR ON EITHER SIDE OF HIM SUDDENLY VANISH, LEAVING NO TRACE OF THEIR EXISTENCE...
...SAVE FOR THE SCORES OF TURANIAN CORPSES, SLAIN BY SWORDS WHICH NEVER WERE THERE!
NOW, THE TABLES ARE TURNED ON THE HORSEMEN WHO HAD SPURRED ON THE GIANT WARRIOR. THEY'VE NO RECOURSE BUT REGAIN THE PALACE GATES...
...AND PRAY TO THEIR CAPTURED TARIM THAT EASTERN WALLS ARE PROOF...
...AGAINST THE VENGEFUL SWORDS COME OUT OF AGHRAPUR!
WELL DONE! THE HORSEMEN HAD WORKED ESPECIALLY HARD TO GUARD THAT ONE-- I SEE THAT NOW!
BUT, WHAT CAUSED THOSE PHANTASMS, NOW MELTED LIKE THE MORNING MIST?
I THINK PERHAPS IT WAS... THIS.


THAT AMULET-- WHICH GLEAMS LIKE A HIGHLY-POLISHED MIRROR? WHY THINK YOU THAT?
I'VE SEEN SUCH SORCERY BEFORE, BALTHAZ; AND--
AND, BY CROM--I'VE JUST SEEN IT AGAIN
THE AMULET TOO--IS--GONE!
BUT, JUST BEFORE IT VANISHED, I SAW--REFLECTED IN ITS FACETS--
--THE HATE-FILLED VISAGE OF THE ONE YOU CALL--KHARAM-AKKAD!
ABOVE, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO WORD.. NO USELESS CRY OF OUTRAGE FROM THE FOILED PRIEST-WIZARD.
HE MERELY TURNS...AND LEAVES THE PARAPET.
BY TARIM, MAN--IF SORCERERS COULD SLAY WITH LOOKS ALONE, YOU'D NEVER SEE FABLED CIMMERIA AGAIN!
FACE THAT DEVIL? NOT FOR ALL THE GOLD IN AGHRAPUR AND MAKKALET!
HERE'S A FRESH SWORD. YOU'LL NEED IT...IF EVER YOU FACE KHARAM-AKKAD ALONE!
I'LL LEAVE SUCH DEEDS FOR THOSE WHO'D SEEK TO RESCUE A CAPTIVE GOD!
BAIT ME NOT, BARBARIAN. WE'VE FOUGHT ENOUGH... AND NOW MUST JOIN YEZDIGERD, AND HELP HIM PLAN TO BRING THE CITY TO ITS KNEES.
WE'LL PLOT A SIEGE, OVER FLAGONS OF WINE...!
AND FAFNIR AND I WILL SEE TO IT THAT THE WINE FLOWS AS FREELY...
...AS DID TURANIAN BLOOD TODAY, ON THE SUN-SPLASHED STONES OF MAKALET!
NEXT: THE BLACK HOUND OF VENGEANCE!
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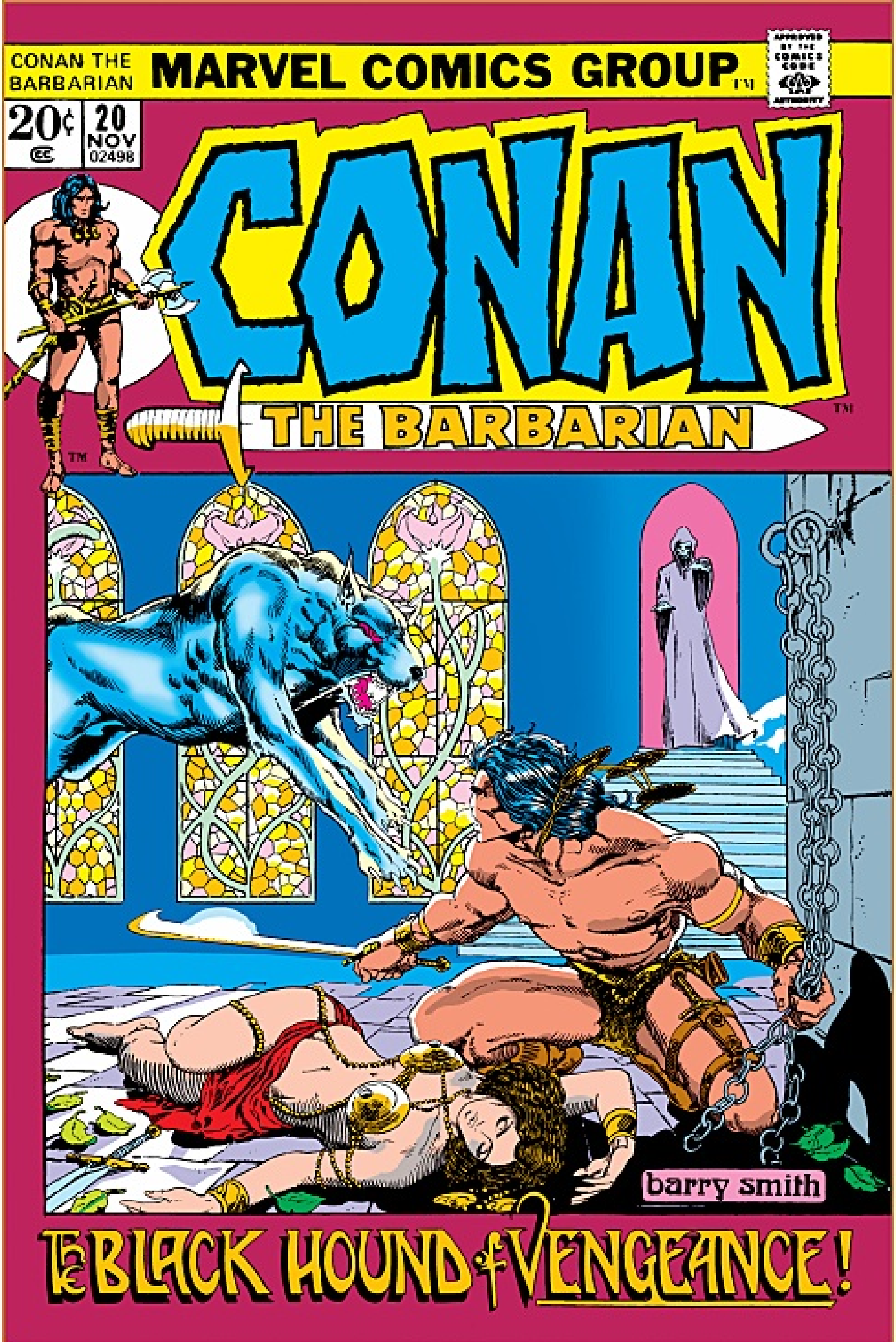
CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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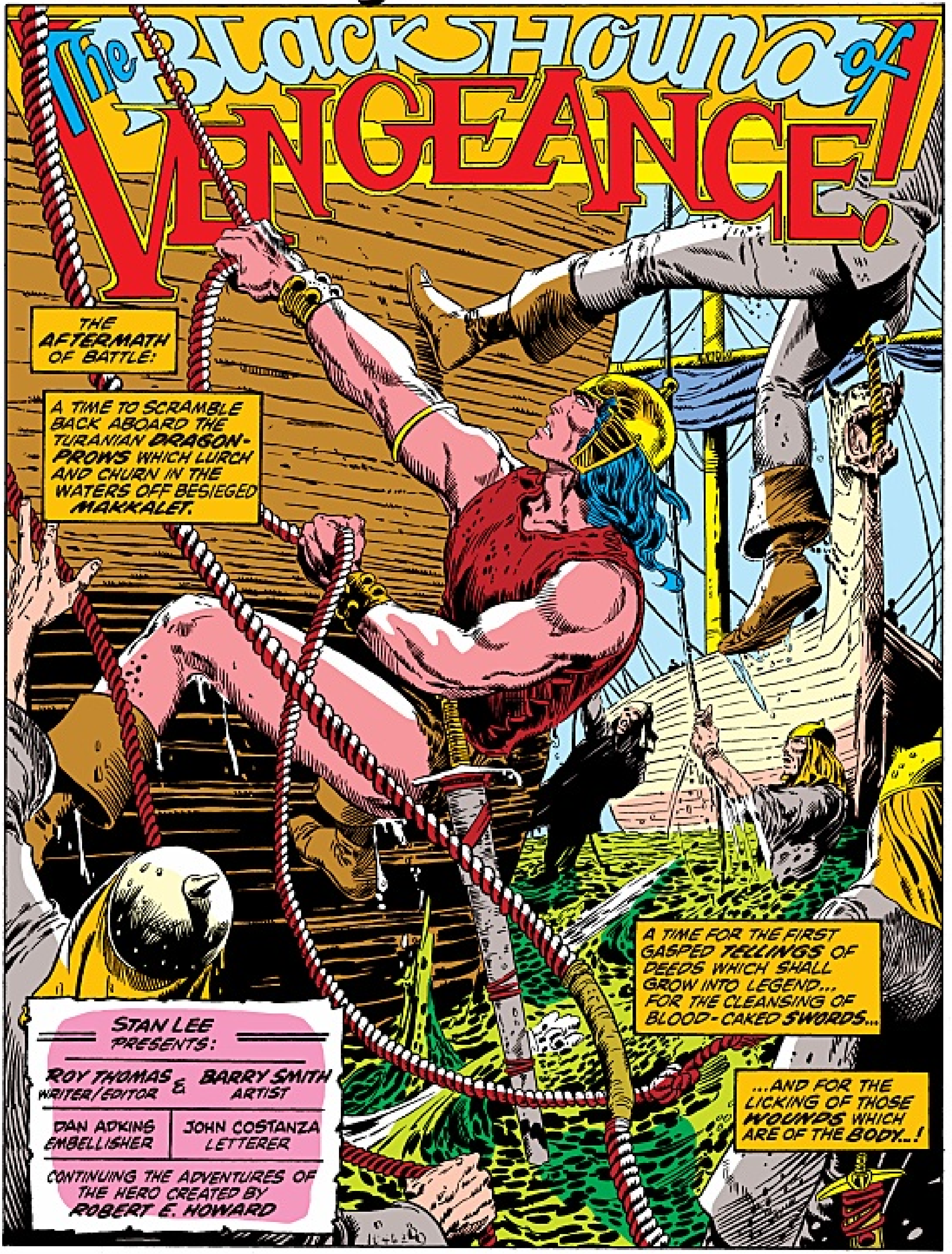
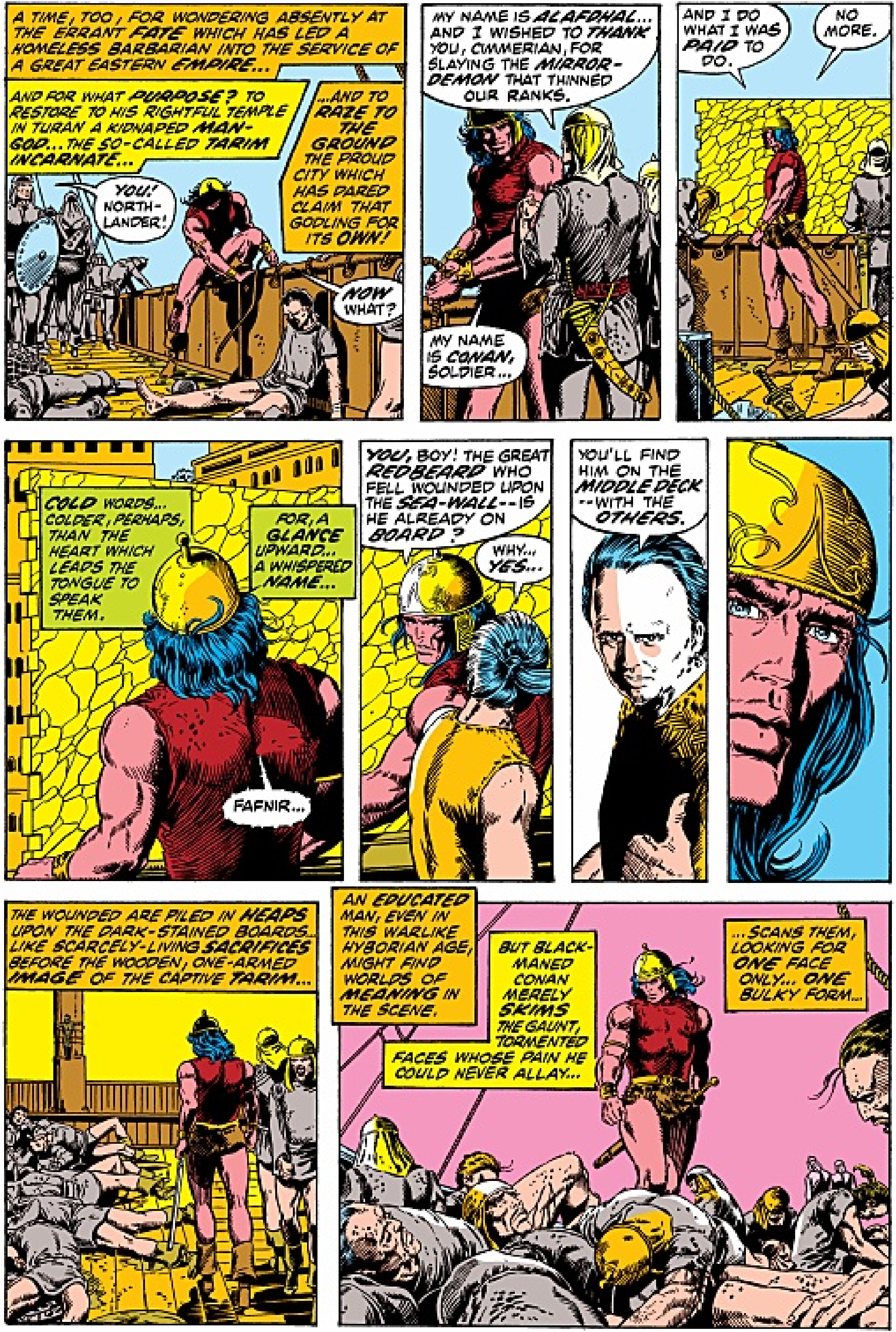
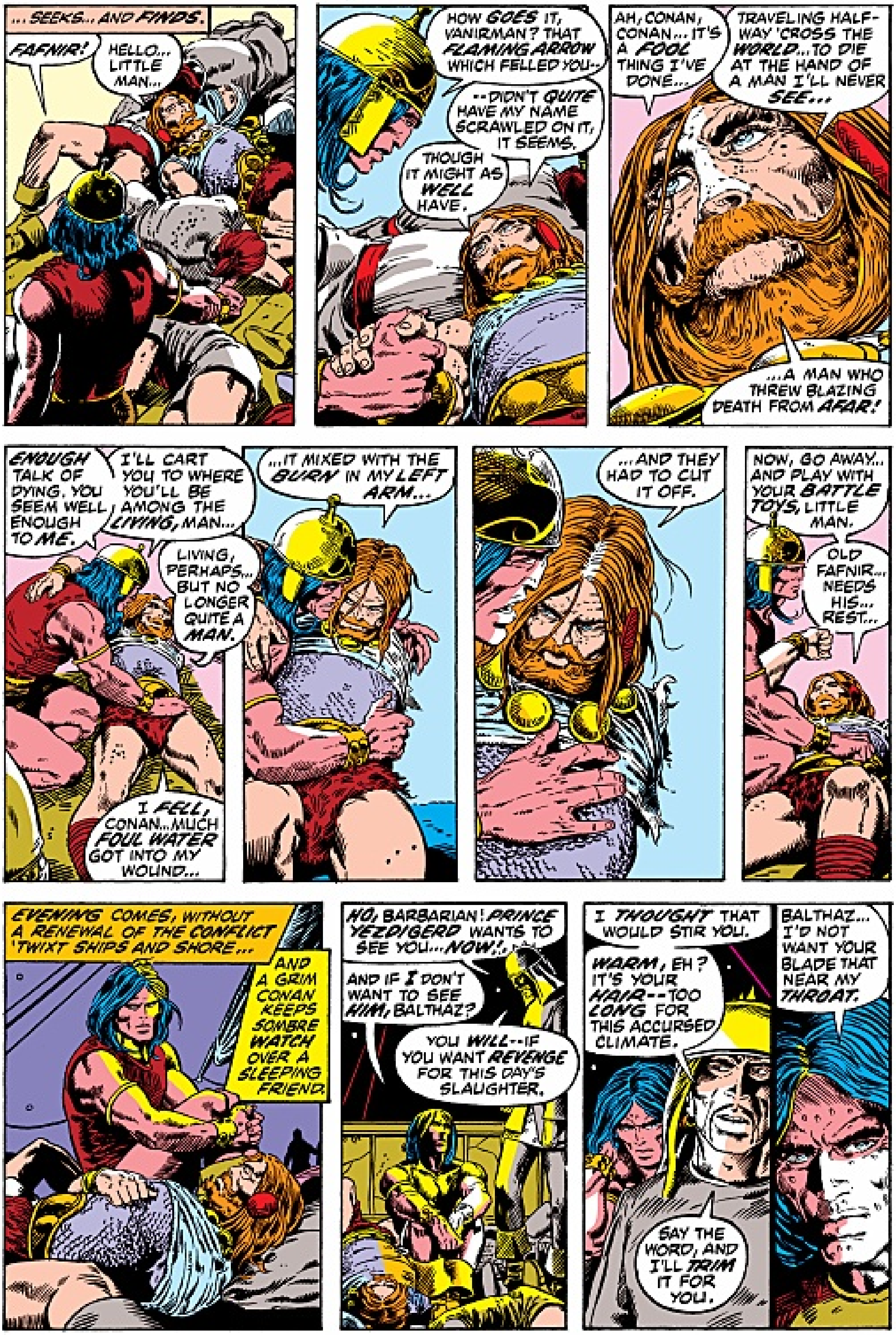
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
barry smith
The BLACK HOUND of VENGEANCE!

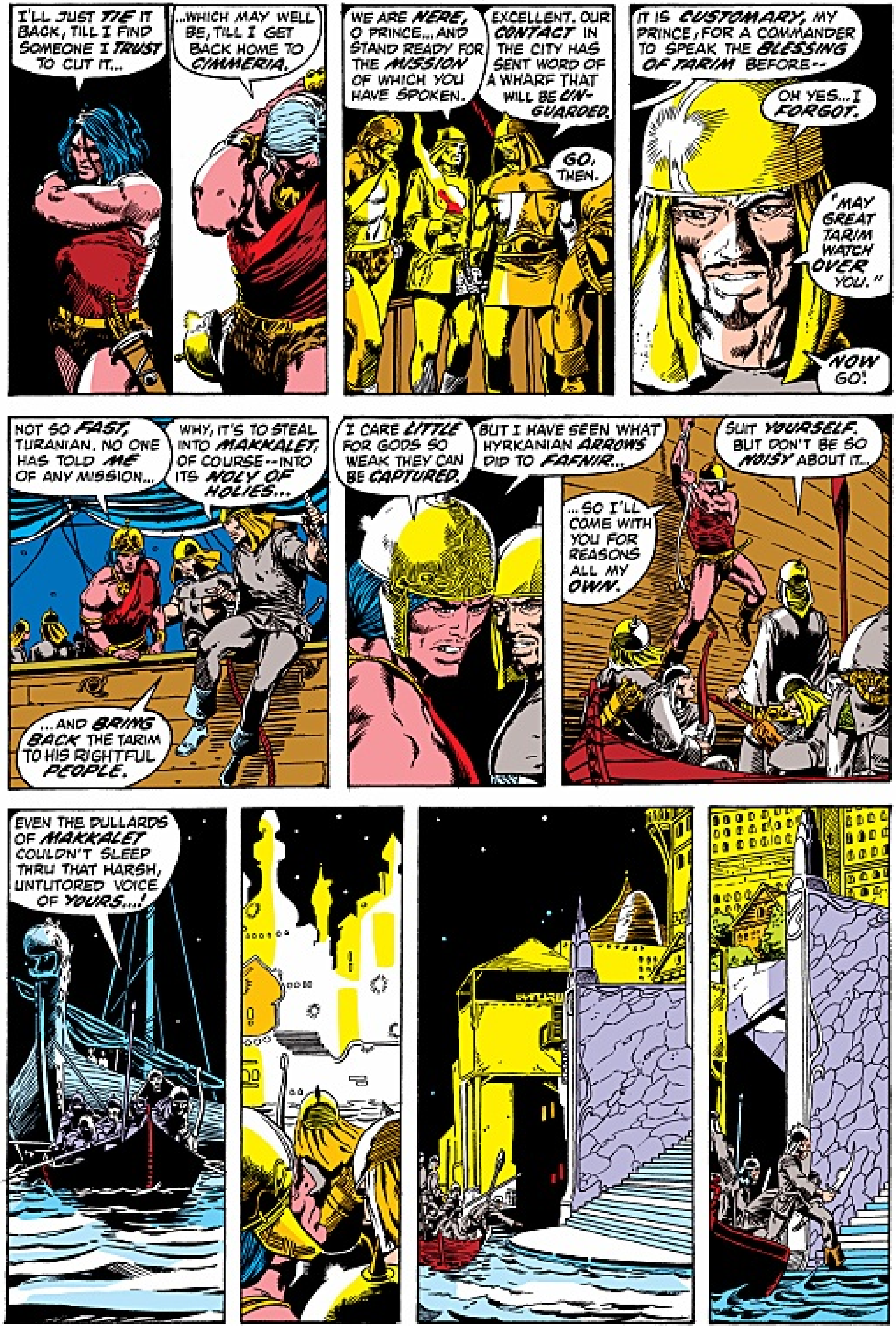
COVER ARTIST & COLORIST: BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

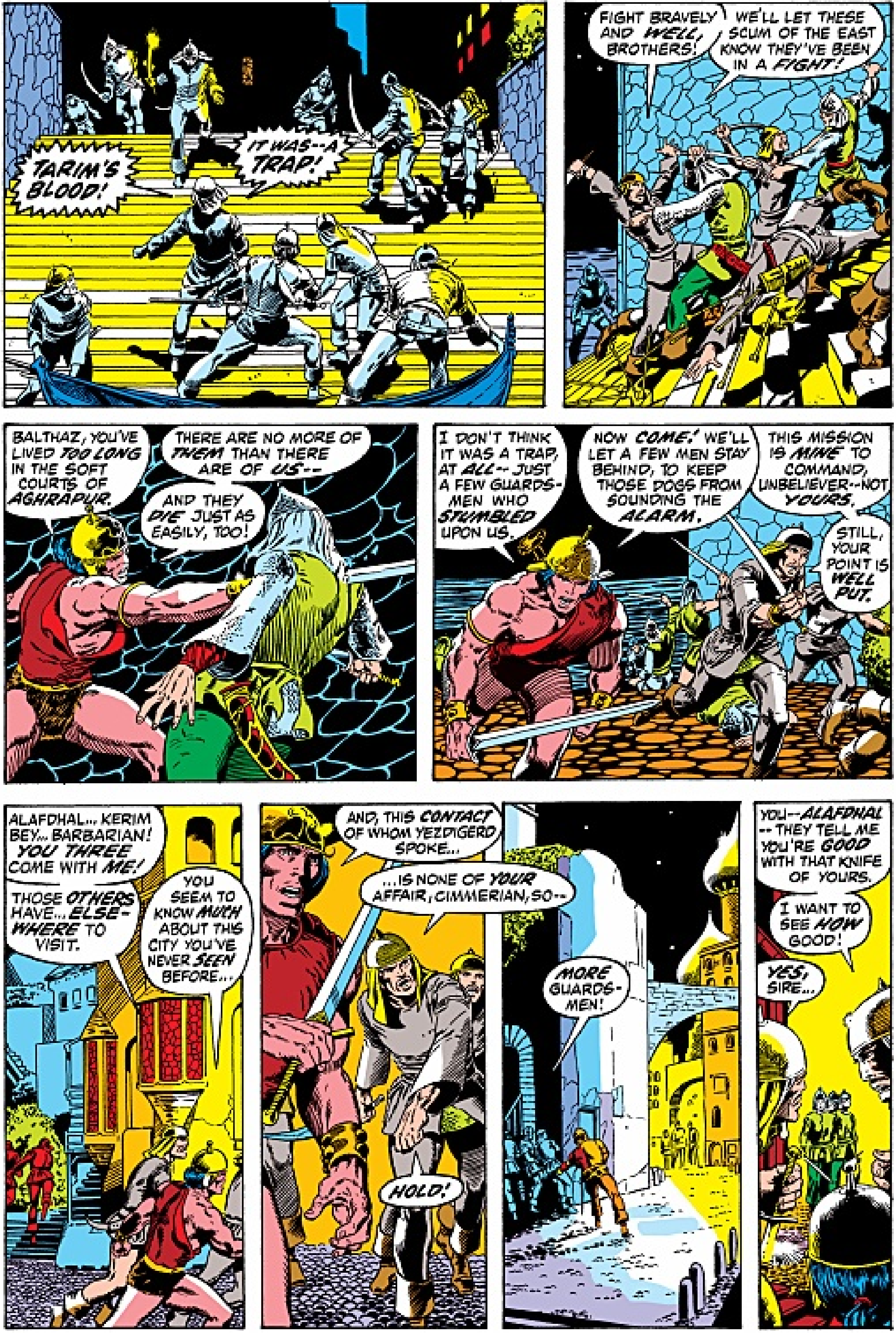
CONAN THE BARBARIAN

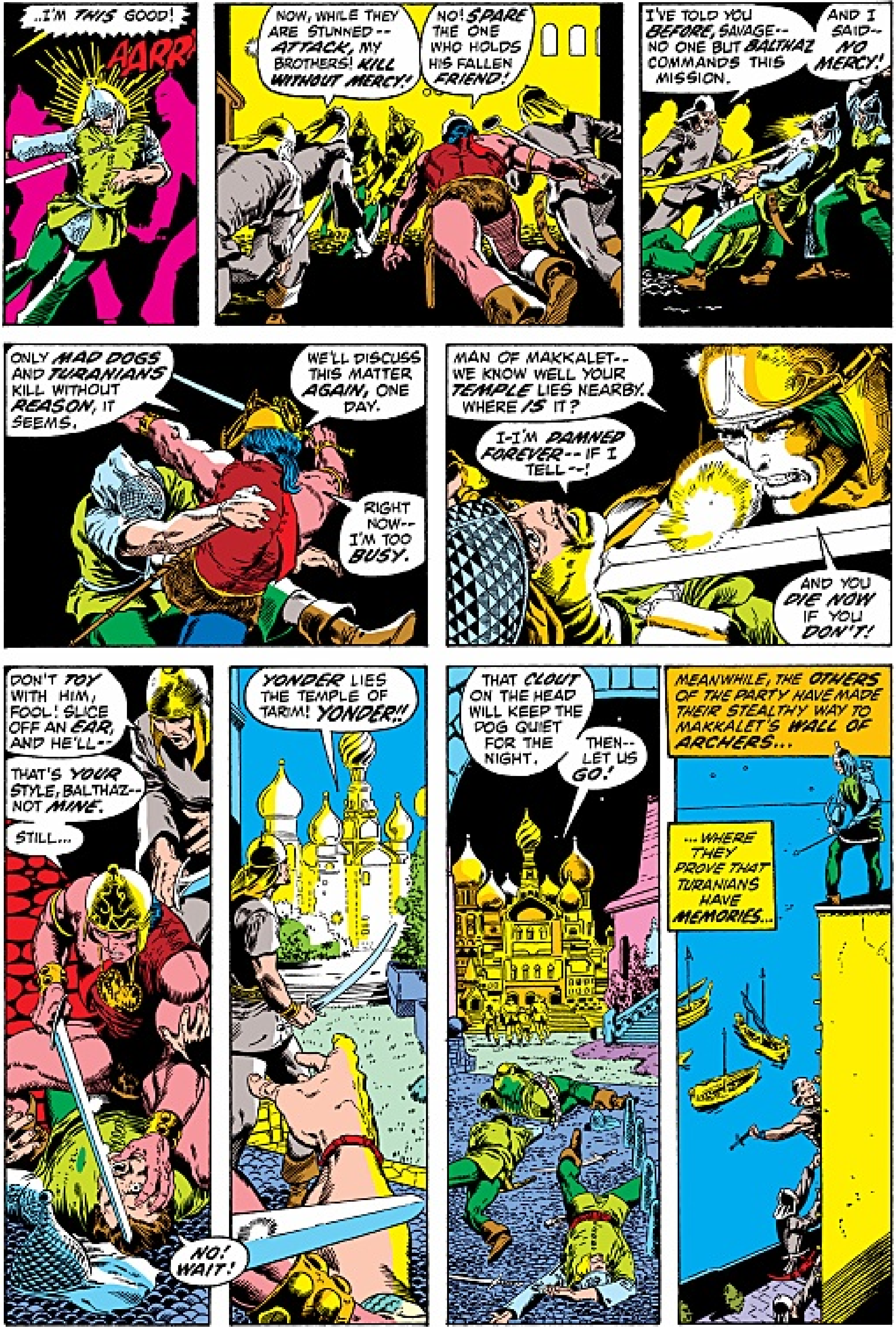

The Black Hound of VENGEANCE!
THE AFTERMATH OF BATTLE:
A TIME TO SCRAMBLE BACK ABOARD THE TURANIAN DRAGON-PROWS WHICH LURCH AND CHURN IN THE WATERS OFF BESIEGED MAKKALET.
A TIME FOR THE FIRST GASPED TELLINGS OF DEEDS WHICH SHALL GROW INTO LEGEND... FOR THE CLEANSING OF BLOOD-CAKED SWORDS...
...AND FOR THE LICKING OF THOSE WOUNDS WHICH ARE OF THE BODY...!
STAN LEE PRESENTS:
ROY THOMAS WRITER/EDITOR & BARRY SMITH ARTIST
DAN ADKINS EMBELLISHER
JOHN COSTANZA LETTERER
CONTINUING THE ADVENTURES OF THE HERO CREATED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

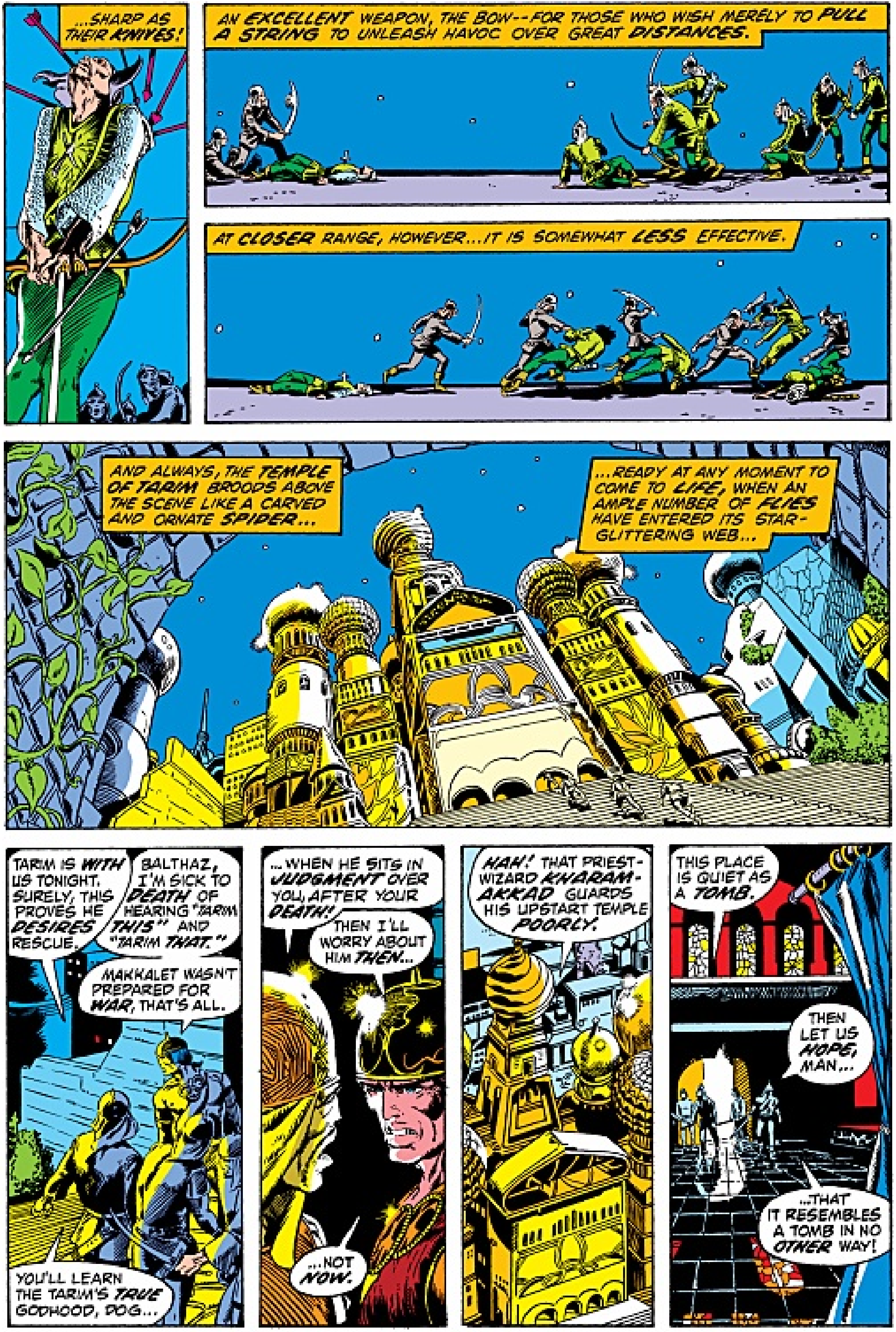

A TIME, TOO, FOR WONDERING ABSENTLY AT THE ERRANT FATE WHICH HAS LED A HOMELESS BARBARIAN INTO THE SERVICE OF A GREAT EASTERN EMPIRE...
AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE? TO RESTORE TO HIS RIGHTFUL TEMPLE IN TURAN A KIDNAPED MAN-GOD... THE SO-CALLED TARIM INCARNATE...
...AND TO RAZE TO THE GROUND THE PROUD CITY WHICH HAS DARED CLAIM THAT GODLING FOR ITS OWN!
YOU! NORTH-LANDER!
NOW WHAT?
MY NAME IS ALAFDHAL... AND I WISHED TO THANK YOU, CIMMERIAN, FOR SLAYING THE MIRROR-DEMON THAT THINNED OUR RANKS.
MY NAME IS CONAN, SOLDIER...
AND I DO WHAT I WAS PAID TO DO.
NO MORE.
COLD WORDS... COLDER, PERHAPS, THAN THE HEART WHICH LEADS THE TONGUE TO SPEAK THEM.
FOR, A GLANCE UPWARD... A WHISPERED NAME...
FAFNIR...
YOU, BOY! THE GREAT REDBEARD WHO FELL WOUNDED UPON THE SEA-WALL--IS HE ALREADY ON BOARD?
WHY... YES...
YOU'LL FIND HIM ON THE MIDDLE DECK --WITH THE OTHERS.
THE WOUNDED ARE PILED IN HEAPS UPON THE DARK-STAINED BOARDS... LIKE SCARCELY-LIVING SACRIFICES BEFORE THE WOODEN, ONE-ARMED IMAGE OF THE CAPTIVE TARIM...
AN EDUCATED MAN, EVEN IN THIS WARLIKE HYBORIAN AGE, MIGHT FIND WORLDS OF MEANING IN THE SCENE.
BUT BLACK-MANED CONAN MERELY SKIMS THE GAUNT, TORMENTED FACES WHOSE PAIN HE COULD NEVER ALLAY...
...SCANS THEM, LOOKING FOR ONE FACE ONLY... ONE BULKY FORM...

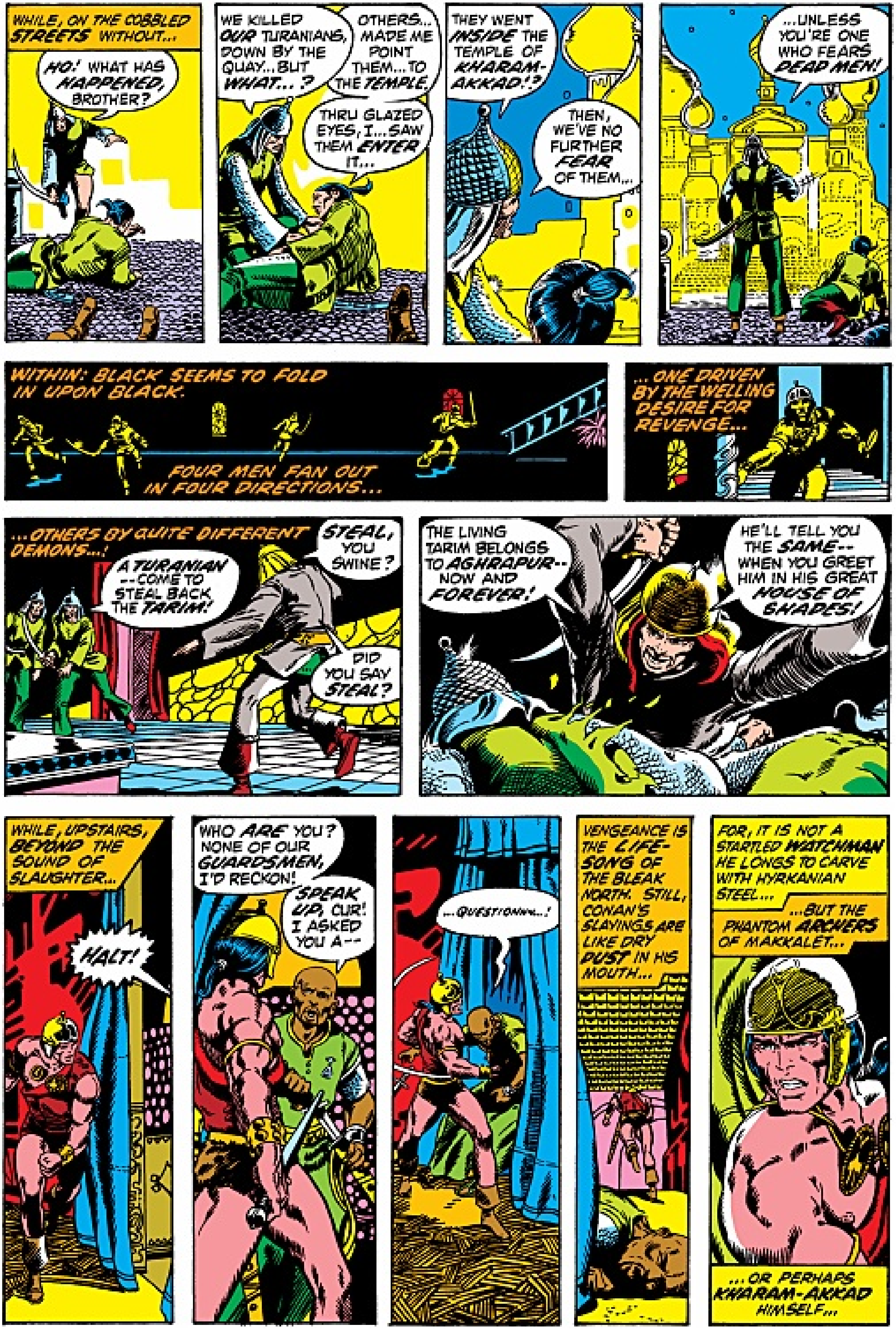

...SEEKS...AND FINDS.
FAFNIR!
HELLO... LITTLE MAN...
HOW GOES IT, VANIRMAN? THAT FLAMING ARROW WHICH FELLED YOU--
--DIDN'T QUITE HAVE MY NAME SCRAWLED ON IT, IT SEEMS.
THOUGH IT MIGHT AS WELL HAVE.
AH, CONAN, CONAN... IT'S A FOOL THING I'VE DONE...
TRAVELING HALF-WAY 'CROSS THE WORLD...TO DIE AT THE HAND OF A MAN I'LL NEVER SEE...
...A MAN WHO THREW BLAZING DEATH FROM AFAR!
ENOUGH TALK OF DYING. YOU SEEM WELL ENOUGH TO ME.
I'LL CART YOU TO WHERE YOU'LL BE AMONG THE LIVING, MAN...
LIVING, PERHAPS... BUT NO LONGER QUITE A MAN.
I FELL, CONAN...MUCH FOUL WATER GOT INTO MY WOUND...
...IT MIXED WITH THE BURN IN MY LEFT ARM...
...AND THEY HAD TO CUT IT OFF.
NOW, GO AWAY... AND PLAY WITH YOUR BATTLE TOYS, LITTLE MAN.
OLD FAFNIR... NEEDS HIS... REST...
EVENING COMES, WITHOUT A RENEWAL OF THE CONFLICT 'TWIXT SHIPS AND SHORE...
AND A GRIM CONAN KEEPS SOMBRE WATCH OVER A SLEEPING FRIEND.
NO, BARBARIAN! PRINCE YEZDIGERD WANTS TO SEE YOU...NOW!
AND IF I DON'T WANT TO SEE HIM, BALTHAZ?
YOU WILL--IF YOU WANT REVENGE FOR THIS DAY'S SLAUGHTER.
I THOUGHT THAT WOULD STIR YOU.
WARM, EH? IT'S YOUR HAIR--TOO LONG FOR THIS ACCURSED CLIMATE.
SAY THE WORD, AND I'LL TRIM IT FOR YOU.
BALTHAZ... I'D NOT WANT YOUR BLADE THAT NEAR MY THROAT.

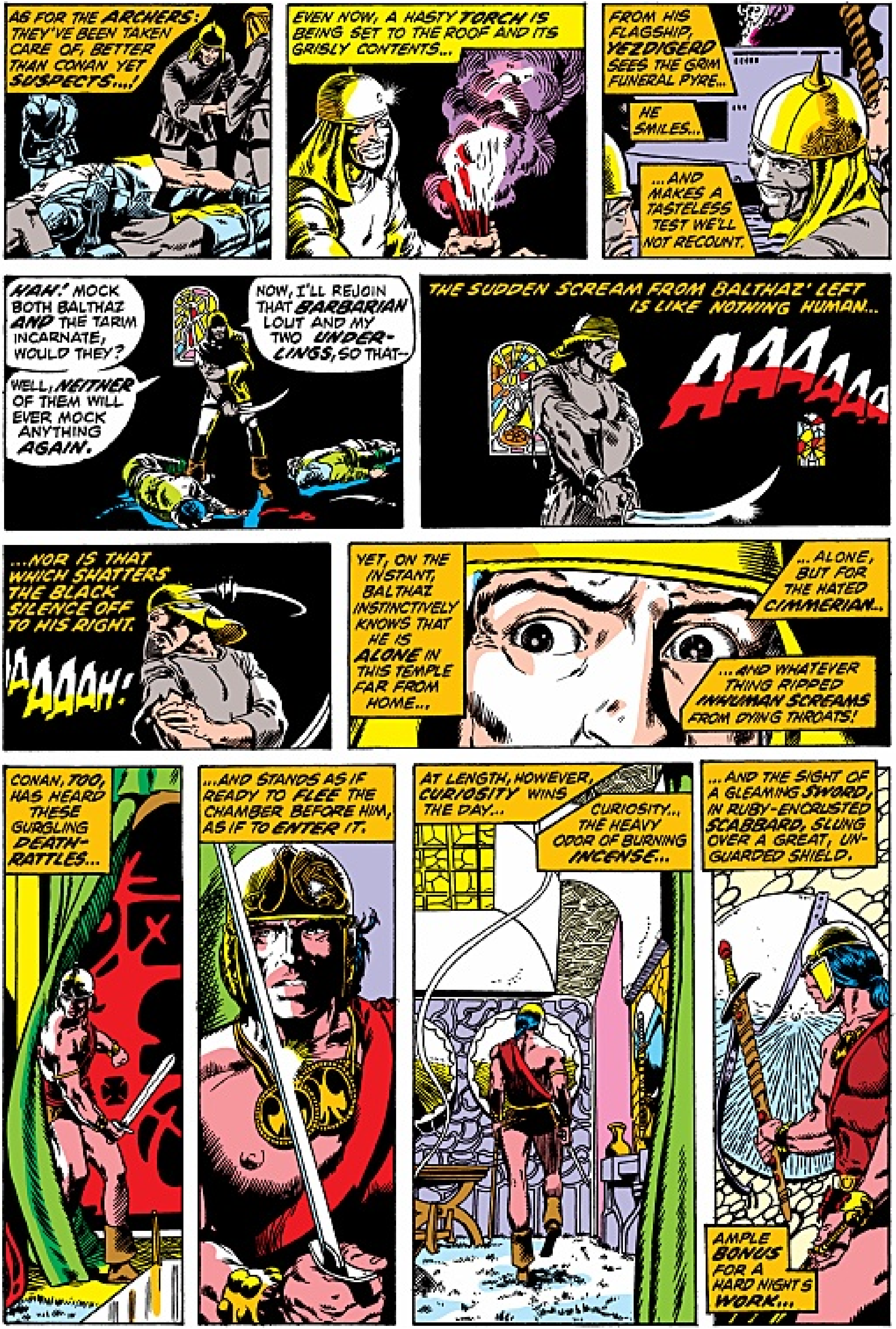

I'LL JUST TIE IT BACK, TILL I FIND SOMEONE I TRUST TO CUT IT...
...WHICH MAY WELL BE, TILL I GET BACK HOME TO CIMMERIA.
WE ARE HERE, O PRINCE... AND STAND READY FOR THE MISSION OF WHICH YOU HAVE SPOKEN.
EXCELLENT. OUR CONTACT IN THE CITY HAS SENT WORD OF A WHARF THAT WILL BE UNGUARDED.
GO, THEN.
IT IS CUSTOMARY, MY PRINCE, FOR A COMMANDER TO SPEAK THE BLESSING OF TARIM BEFORE--
OH YES... I FORGOT.
"MAY GREAT TARIM WATCH OVER YOU."
NOW GO!
NOT SO FAST, TURANIAN. NO ONE HAS TOLD ME OF ANY MISSION...
WHY, IT'S TO STEAL INTO MAKKALET, OF COURSE--INTO ITS HOLY OF HOLIES...
...AND BRING BACK THE TARIM TO HIS RIGHTFUL PEOPLE.
I CARE LITTLE FOR GODS SO WEAK THEY CAN BE CAPTURED.
BUT I HAVE SEEN WHAT HYRKANIAN ARROWS DID TO FAFNIR...
...SO I'LL COME WITH YOU FOR REASONS ALL MY OWN.
SUIT YOURSELF. BUT DON'T BE SO NOISY ABOUT IT...
EVEN THE DULLARDS OF MAKKALET COULDN'T SLEEP THRU THAT HARSH, UNTUTORED VOICE OF YOURS...!

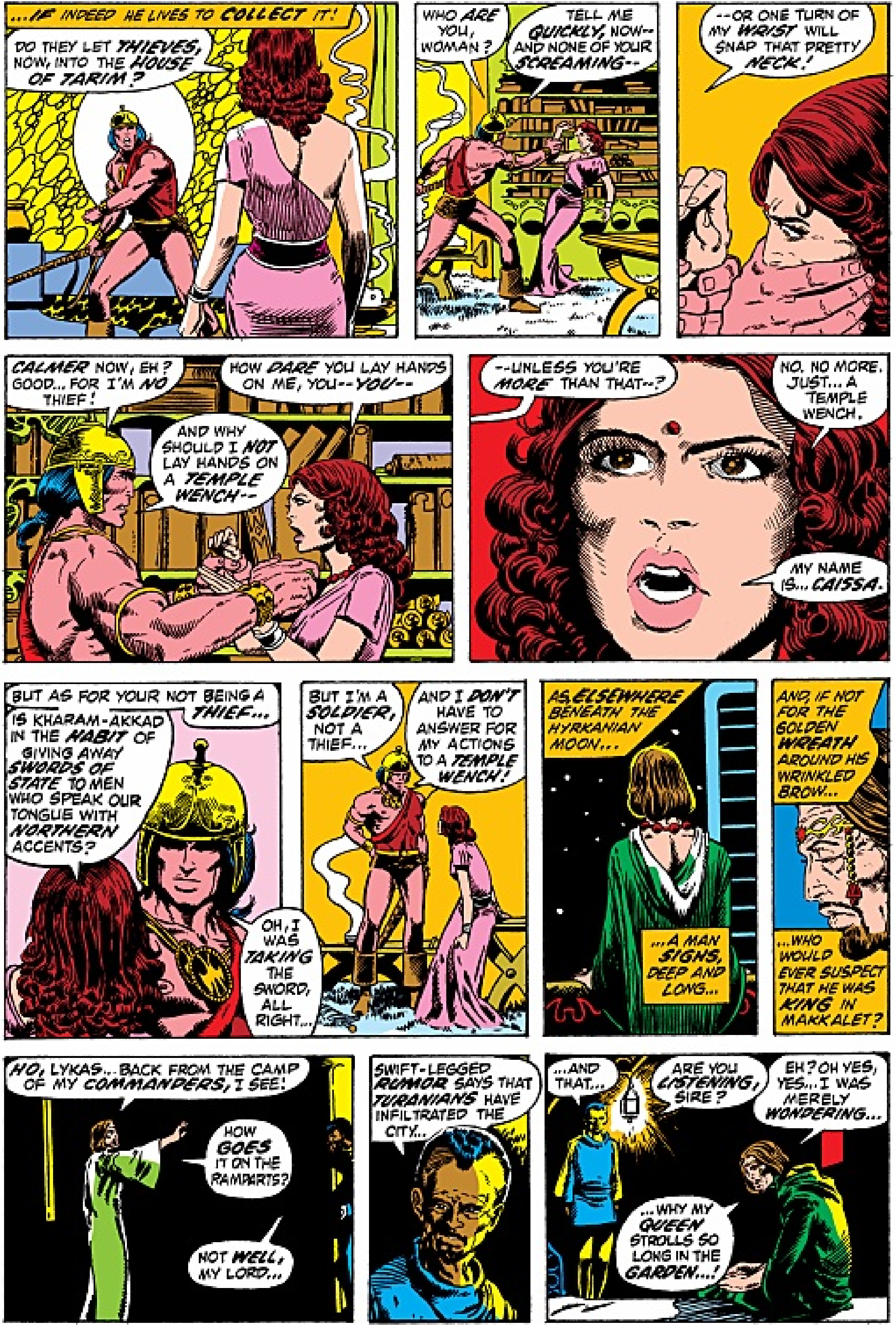

TARIM'S BLOOD!
IT WAS--A TRAP!
FIGHT BRAVELY AND *WELL*, BROTHERS!
WE'LL LET THESE SCUM OF THE EAST KNOW THEY'VE BEEN IN A *FIGHT*!
BALTHAZ, YOU'VE LIVED *TOO LONG* IN THE SOFT COURTS OF *AGHRAPUR*.
THERE ARE NO MORE OF *THEM* THAN THERE ARE OF *US*--
AND THEY *DIE* JUST AS EASILY, TOO!
I DON'T THINK IT WAS A TRAP, AT *ALL*-- JUST A FEW GUARDSMEN WHO *STUMBLED* UPON US.
NOW *COME!* WE'LL LET A FEW MEN STAY BEHIND, TO KEEP THOSE DOGS FROM SOUNDING THE *ALARM*.
THIS MISSION IS *MINE* TO COMMAND, UNBELIEVER--NOT *YOURS*.
STILL, YOUR POINT IS *WELL PUT.*
ALAFDHAL... KERIM BEY... BARBARIAN! *YOU THREE* COME WITH *ME!*
THOSE *OTHERS* HAVE... *ELSEWHERE* TO VISIT.
YOU SEEM TO KNOW *MUCH* ABOUT THIS CITY YOU'VE NEVER *SEEN* BEFORE...
AND, THIS *CONTACT* OF WHOM YEZDIGERD SPOKE...
...IS NONE OF *YOUR* AFFAIR, CIMMERIAN, SO--
HOLD!
MORE GUARDSMEN!
YOU--*ALAFDHAL* -- THEY TELL ME YOU'RE *GOOD* WITH THAT KNIFE OF YOURS.
I WANT TO SEE *HOW* GOOD!
YES, SIRE...

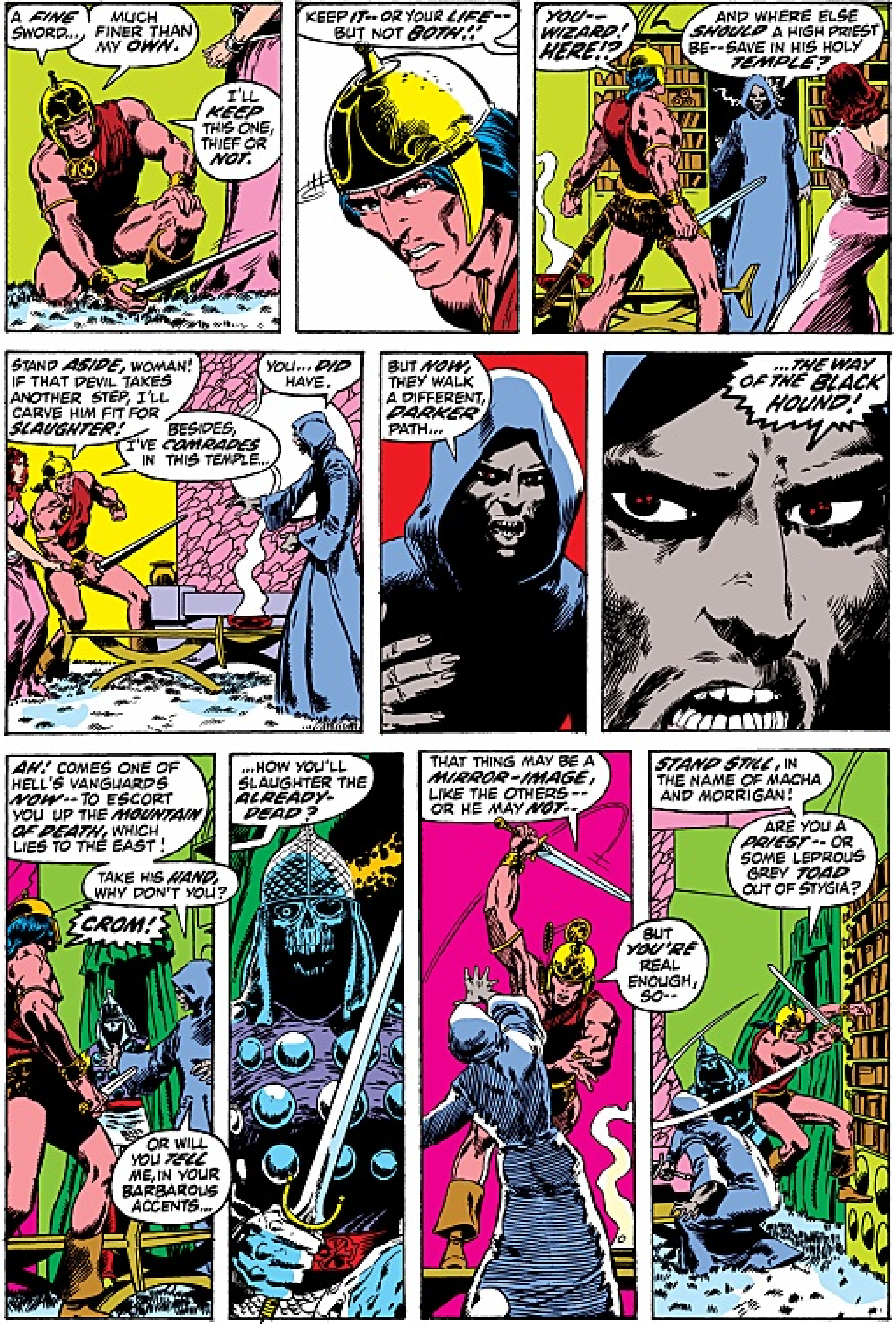

..I'M THIS GOOD!
AARR!
NOW, WHILE THEY ARE STUNNED -- ATTACK, MY BROTHERS! KILL WITHOUT MERCY!
NO! SPARE THE ONE WHO HOLDS HIS FALLEN FRIEND!
I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE, SAVAGE-- NO ONE BUT BALTHAZ COMMANDS THIS MISSION.
AND I SAID-- NO MERCY!
ONLY MAD DOGS AND TURANIANS KILL WITHOUT REASON, IT SEEMS.
WE'LL DISCUSS THIS MATTER AGAIN, ONE DAY.
RIGHT NOW-- I'M TOO BUSY.
MAN OF MAKKALET-- WE KNOW WELL YOUR TEMPLE LIES NEARBY. WHERE IS IT?
I-I'M DAMNED FOREVER-- IF I TELL--!
AND YOU DIE NOW IF YOU DON'T!
DON'T TOY WITH HIM, FOOL! SLICE OFF AN EAR, AND HE'LL--
THAT'S YOUR STYLE, BALTHAZ-- NOT MINE.
STILL...
YONDER LIES THE TEMPLE OF TARIM! YONDER!!
NO! WAIT!
THAT CLOUT ON THE HEAD WILL KEEP THE DOG QUIET FOR THE NIGHT.
THEN-- LET US GO!
MEANWHILE, THE OTHERS OF THE PARTY HAVE MADE THEIR STEALTHY WAY TO MAKKALET'S WALL OF ARCHERS...
...WHERE THEY PROVE THAT TURANIANS HAVE MEMORIES...

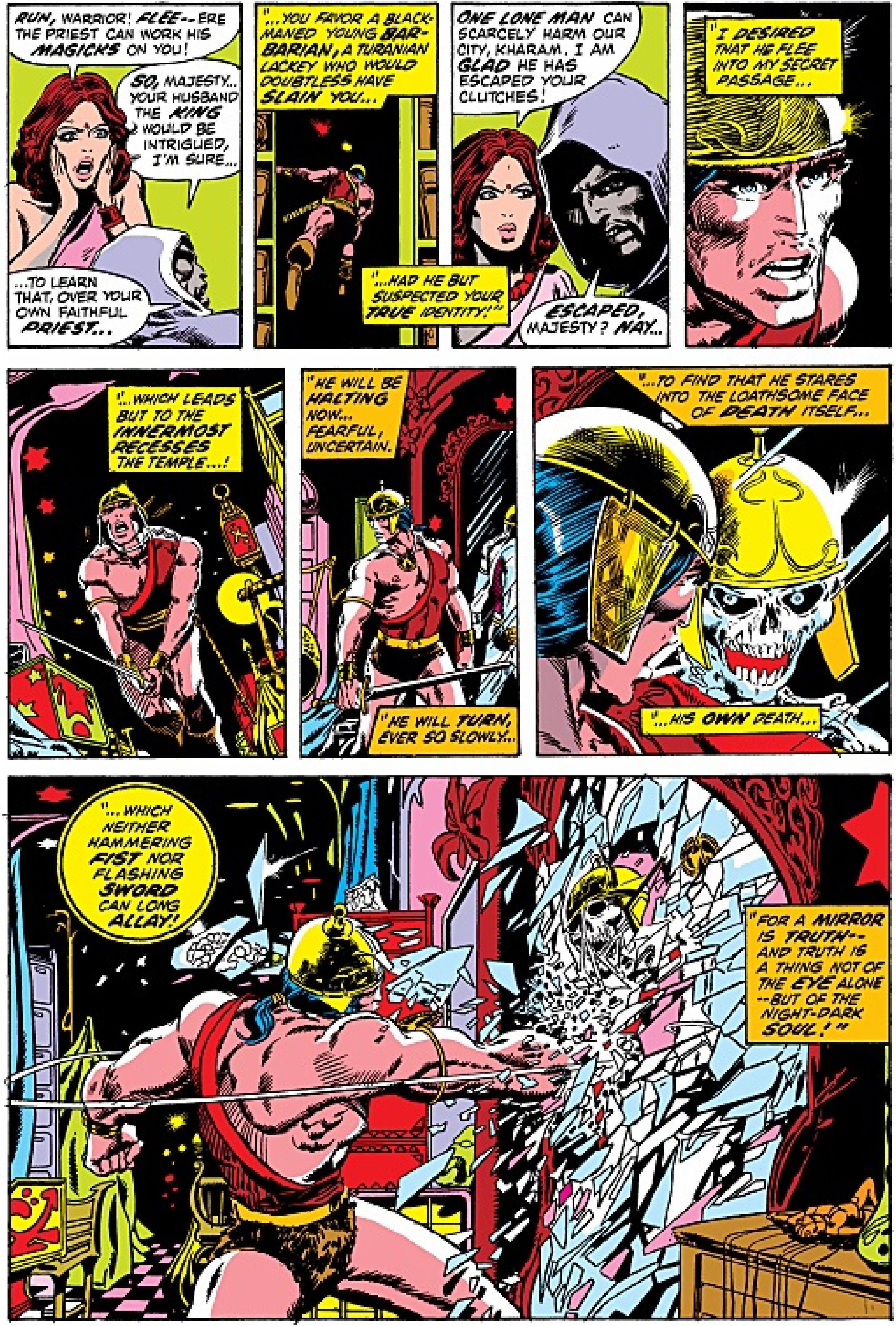

...SHARP AS THEIR KNIVES!
AN EXCELLENT WEAPON, THE BOW--FOR THOSE WHO WISH MERELY TO PULL A STRING TO UNLEASH HAVOC OVER GREAT DISTANCES.
AT CLOSER RANGE, HOWEVER...IT IS SOMEWHAT LESS EFFECTIVE.
AND ALWAYS, THE TEMPLE OF TARIM BROODS ABOVE THE SCENE LIKE A CARVED AND ORNATE SPIDER...
...READY AT ANY MOMENT TO COME TO LIFE, WHEN AN AMPLE NUMBER OF FLIES HAVE ENTERED ITS STAR-GLITTERING WEB...
TARIM IS WITH US TONIGHT. SURELY, THIS PROVES HE DESIRES RESCUE.
BALTHAZ, I'M SICK TO DEATH OF HEARING "TARIM THIS" AND "TARIM THAT."
MAKKALET WASN'T PREPARED FOR WAR, THAT'S ALL.
YOU'LL LEARN THE TARIM'S TRUE GODHOOD, DOG...
...WHEN HE SITS IN JUDGMENT OVER YOU, AFTER YOUR DEATH!
THEN I'LL WORRY ABOUT HIM THEN...
...NOT NOW.
HAH! THAT PRIEST-WIZARD KHARAM-AKKAD GUARDS HIS UPSTART TEMPLE POORLY.
THIS PLACE IS QUIET AS A TOMB.
THEN LET US HOPE, MAN...
...THAT IT RESEMBLES A TOMB IN NO OTHER WAY!

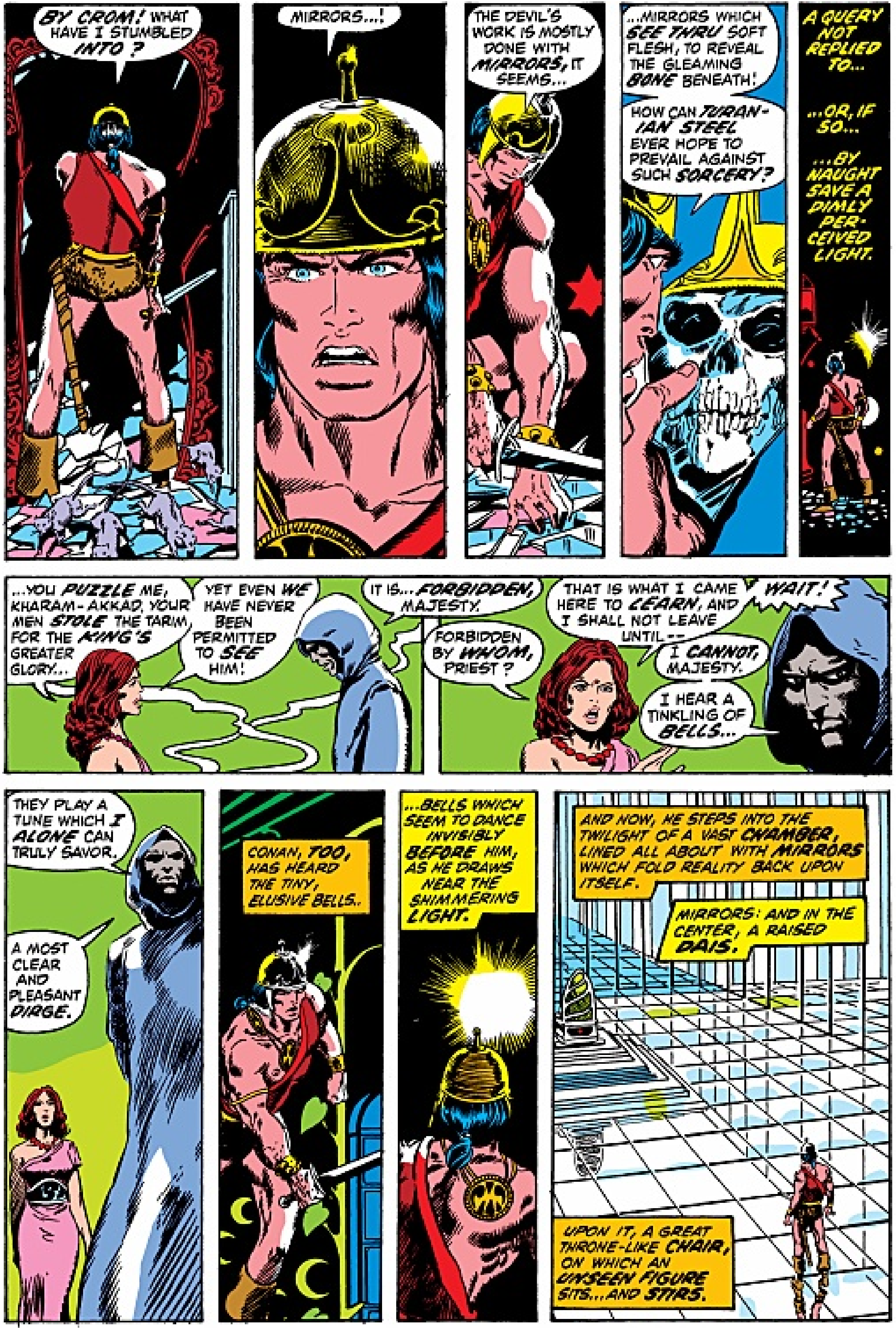

WHILE, ON THE COBBLED STREETS WITHOUT...
HO! WHAT HAS HAPPENED, BROTHER?
WE KILLED OUR TURANIANS, DOWN BY THE QUAY...BUT WHAT... ?
OTHERS... MADE ME POINT THEM...TO THE TEMPLE.
THRU GLAZED EYES, I...SAW THEM ENTER IT...
THEY WENT INSIDE THE TEMPLE OF KHARAM-AKKAD!?
THEN, WE'VE NO FURTHER FEAR OF THEM...
...UNLESS YOU'RE ONE WHO FEARS DEAD MEN!
WITHIN: BLACK SEEMS TO FOLD IN UPON BLACK.
FOUR MEN FAN OUT IN FOUR DIRECTIONS...
...ONE DRIVEN BY THE WELLING DESIRE FOR REVENGE...
...OTHERS BY QUITE DIFFERENT DEMONS...!
A TURANIAN --COME TO STEAL BACK THE TARIM!
STEAL, YOU SWINE?
DID YOU SAY STEAL?
THE LIVING TARIM BELONGS TO AGHRAPUR-- NOW AND FOREVER!
HE'LL TELL YOU THE SAME-- WHEN YOU GREET HIM IN HIS GREAT HOUSE OF SHAPES!
WHILE, UPSTAIRS, BEYOND THE SOUND OF SLAUGHTER...
HALT!
WHO ARE YOU? NONE OF OUR GUARDSMEN, I'D RECKON!
SPEAK UP, CUR! I ASKED YOU A--
...QUESTIONNN...!
VENGEANCE IS THE LIFE-SONG OF THE BLEAK NORTH. STILL, CONAN'S SLAYINGS ARE LIKE DRY DUST IN HIS MOUTH...
FOR, IT IS NOT A STARTLED WATCHMAN HE LONGS TO CARVE WITH HYRKANIAN STEEL...
...BUT THE PHANTOM ARCHERS OF MAKKALET...
...OR PERHAPS KHARAM-AKKAD HIMSELF...

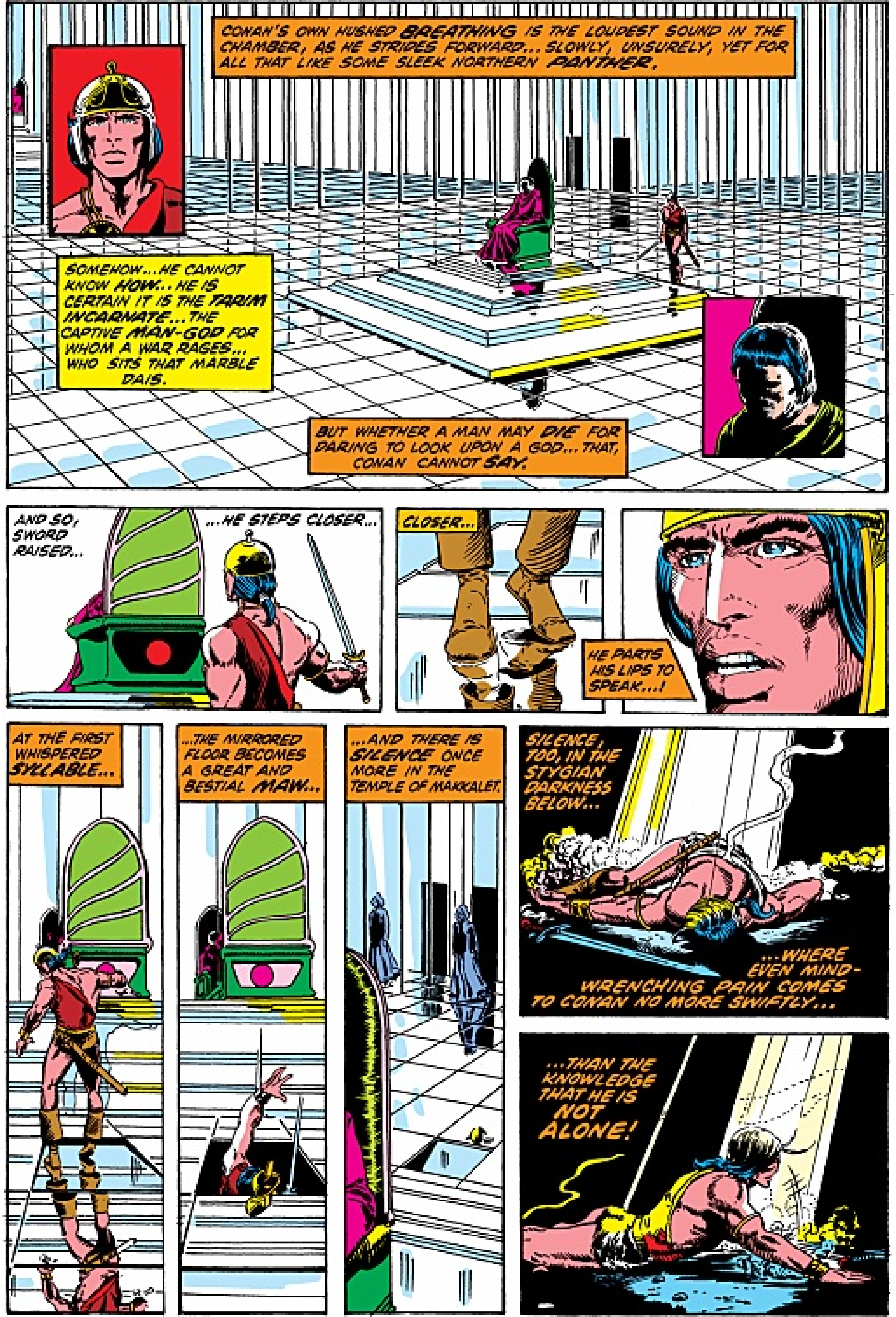

AS FOR THE ARCHERS: THEY'VE BEEN TAKEN CARE OF, BETTER THAN CONAN YET SUSPECTS...!
EVEN NOW, A HASTY TORCH IS BEING SET TO THE ROOF AND ITS GRISLY CONTENTS...
FROM HIS FLAGSHIP, YEZDIGERD SEES THE GRIM FUNERAL PYRE...
HE SMILES...
...AND MAKES A TASTELESS JEST WE'LL NOT RECOUNT.
HAH! MOCK BOTH BALTHAZ AND THE TARIM INCARNATE, WOULD THEY?
WELL, NEITHER OF THEM WILL EVER MOCK ANYTHING AGAIN.
NOW, I'LL REJOIN THAT BARBARIAN LOUT AND MY TWO UNDERLINGS, SO THAT--
THE SUDDEN SCREAM FROM BALTHAZ' LEFT IS LIKE NOTHING HUMAN...
AAAAAAA
...NOR IS THAT WHICH SHATTERS THE BLACK SILENCE OFF TO HIS RIGHT.
AAAAH!
YET, ON THE INSTANT, BALTHAZ INSTINCTIVELY KNOWS THAT HE IS ALONE IN THIS TEMPLE FAR FROM HOME...
...ALONE, BUT FOR THE HATED CIMMERIAN...
...AND WHATEVER THING RIPPED INHUMAN SCREAMS FROM DYING THROATS!
CONAN, TOO, HAS HEARD THESE GURGLING DEATH-RATTLES...
...AND STANDS AS IF READY TO FLEE THE CHAMBER BEFORE HIM, AS IF TO ENTER IT.
AT LENGTH, HOWEVER, CURIOSITY WINS THE DAY...
CURIOSITY... THE HEAVY ODOR OF BURNING INCENSE...
...AND THE SIGHT OF A GLEAMING SWORD, IN RUBY-ENCRUSTED SCABBARD, SLUNG OVER A GREAT, UNGUARDED SHIELD.
AMPLE BONUS FOR A HARD NIGHT'S WORK...

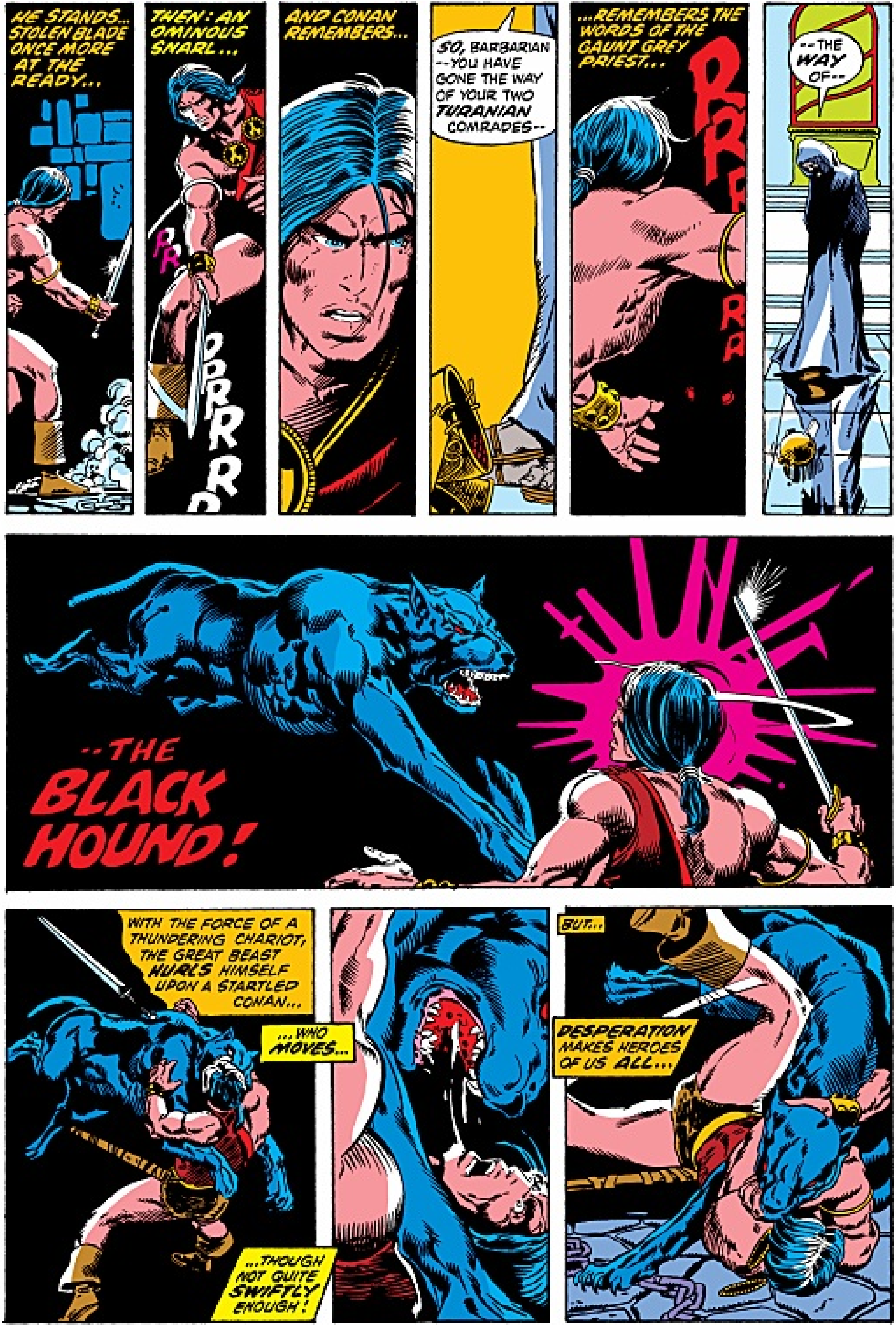

...IF INDEED HE LIVES TO COLLECT IT!
DO THEY LET THIEVES, NOW, INTO THE HOUSE OF TARIM?
WHO ARE YOU, WOMAN?
TELL ME QUICKLY, NOW-- AND NONE OF YOUR SCREAMING--
--OR ONE TURN OF MY WRIST WILL SNAP THAT PRETTY NECK!
CALMER NOW, EH? GOOD... FOR I'M NO THIEF!
HOW DARE YOU LAY HANDS ON ME, YOU--YOU--
AND WHY SHOULD I NOT LAY HANDS ON A TEMPLE WENCH--
--UNLESS YOU'RE MORE THAN THAT--?
NO, NO MORE. JUST... A TEMPLE WENCH.
MY NAME IS... CAISSA.
BUT AS FOR YOUR NOT BEING A THIEF...
IS KHARAM-AKKAD IN THE HABIT OF GIVING AWAY SWORDS OF STATE TO MEN WHO SPEAK OUR TONGUE WITH NORTHERN ACCENTS?
OH, I WAS TAKING THE SWORD, ALL RIGHT...
BUT I'M A SOLDIER, NOT A THIEF...
AND I DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER FOR MY ACTIONS TO A TEMPLE WENCH!
AS, ELSEWHERE BENEATH THE HYRKANIAN MOON...
...A MAN SIGHS, DEEP AND LONG...
AND, IF NOT FOR THE GOLDEN WREATH AROUND HIS WRINKLED BROW...
...WHO WOULD EVER SUSPECT THAT HE WAS KING IN MAKKALET?
HO, LYKAS... BACK FROM THE CAMP OF MY COMMANDERS, I SEE!
HOW GOES IT ON THE RAMPARTS?
NOT WELL, MY LORD...
SWIFT-LEGGED RUMOR SAYS THAT TURANIANS HAVE INFILTRATED THE CITY...
...AND THAT...
ARE YOU LISTENING, SIRE?
EH? OH YES, YES... I WAS MERELY WONDERING...
...WHY MY QUEEN STROLLS SO LONG IN THE GARDEN...!

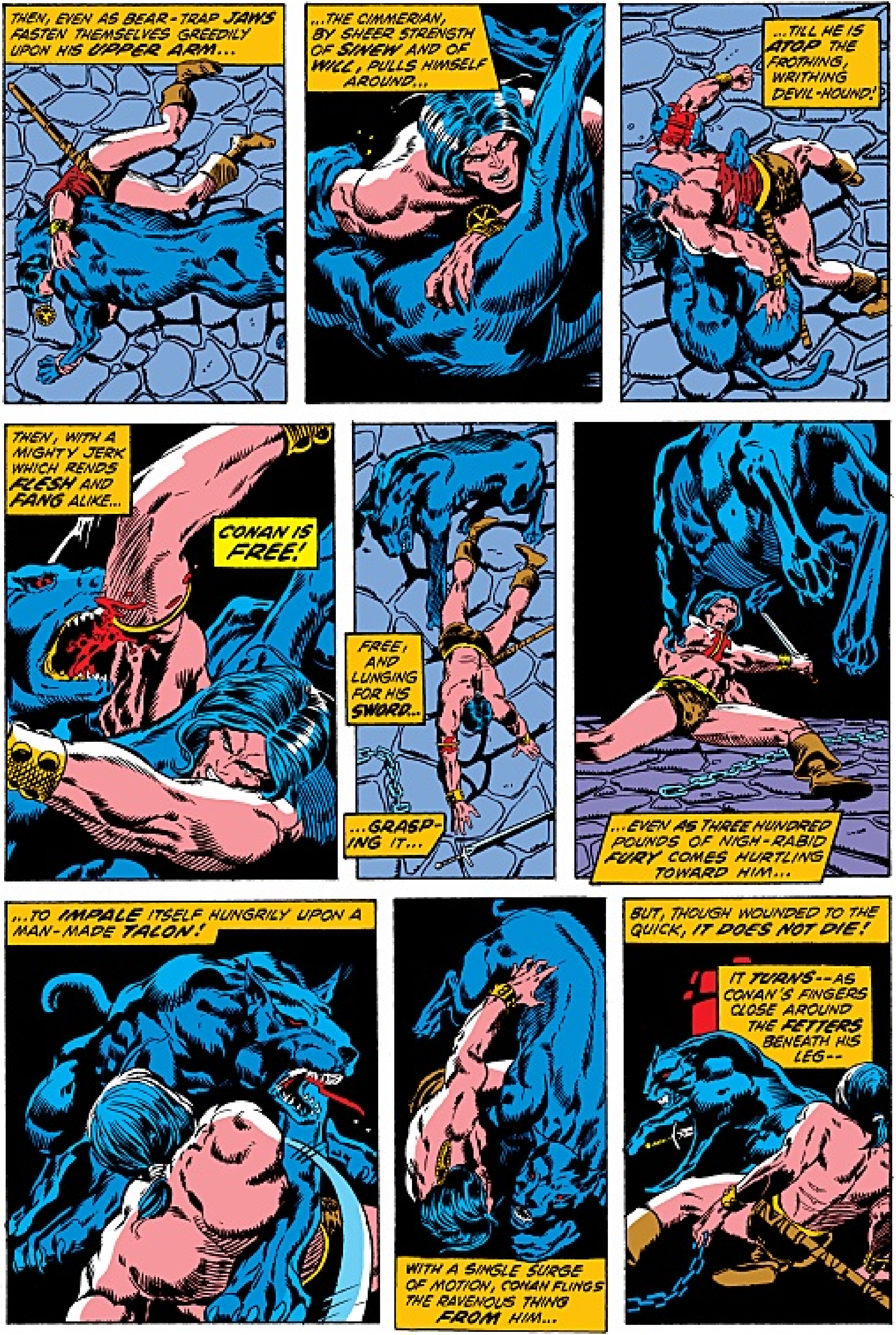

A FINE SWORD...
MUCH FINER THAN MY OWN.
I'LL KEEP THIS ONE, THIEF OR NOT.
KEEP IT-- OR YOUR LIFE-- BUT NOT BOTH!!
YOU-- WIZARD! HERE!?
AND WHERE ELSE SHOULD A HIGH PRIEST BE--SAVE IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE?
STAND ASIDE, WOMAN! IF THAT DEVIL TAKES ANOTHER STEP, I'LL CARVE HIM FIT FOR SLAUGHTER!
BESIDES, I'VE COMRADES IN THIS TEMPLE...
YOU... DID HAVE.
BUT NOW, THEY WALK A DIFFERENT, DARKER PATH...
...THE WAY OF THE BLACK HOUND!
AH! COMES ONE OF HELL'S VANGUARDS NOW-- TO ESCORT YOU UP THE MOUNTAIN OF DEATH, WHICH LIES TO THE EAST!
TAKE HIS HAND, WHY DON'T YOU?
CROM!
OR WILL YOU TELL ME, IN YOUR BARBAROUS ACCENTS...
...HOW YOU'LL SLAUGHTER THE ALREADY-DEAD?
THAT THING MAY BE A MIRROR-IMAGE, LIKE THE OTHERS-- OR HE MAY NOT--
BUT YOU'RE REAL ENOUGH, SO--
STAND STILL, IN THE NAME OF MACHA AND MORRIGAN!
ARE YOU A PRIEST-- OR SOME LEPROUS GREY TOAD OUT OF STYGIA?

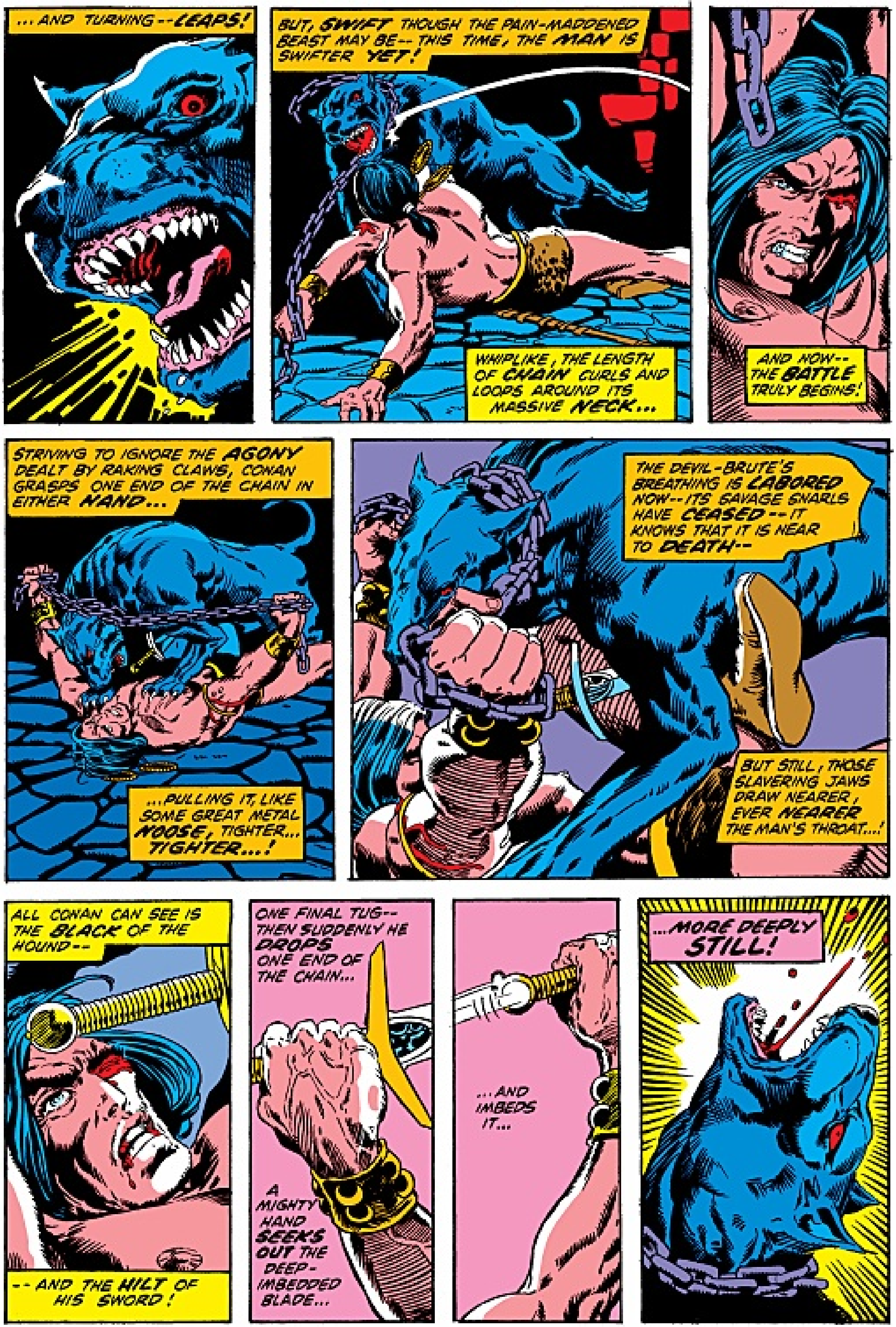

RUN, WARRIOR! FLEE--ERE THE PRIEST CAN WORK HIS MAGICKS ON YOU!
SO, MAJESTY... YOUR HUSBAND THE KING WOULD BE INTRIGUED, I'M SURE...
...TO LEARN THAT, OVER YOUR OWN FAITHFUL PRIEST...
"...YOU FAVOR A BLACK-MANED YOUNG BARBARIAN, A TURANIAN LACKEY WHO WOULD DOUBTLESS HAVE SLAIN YOU...
"...HAD HE BUT SUSPECTED YOUR TRUE IDENTITY!"
ONE LONE MAN CAN SCARCELY HARM OUR CITY, KHARAM. I AM GLAD HE HAS ESCAPED YOUR CLUTCHES!
ESCAPED, MAJESTY? NAY...
"I DESIRED THAT HE FLEE INTO MY SECRET PASSAGE...
"...WHICH LEADS BUT TO THE INNERMOST RECESSES THE TEMPLE...!
"HE WILL BE HALTING NOW... FEARFUL, UNCERTAIN.
"HE WILL TURN, EVER SO SLOWLY...
"...TO FIND THAT HE STARES INTO THE LOATHSOME FACE OF DEATH ITSELF...
"...HIS OWN DEATH...
"...WHICH NEITHER HAMMERING FIST NOR FLASHING SWORD CAN LONG ALLAY!
"FOR A MIRROR IS TRUTH--AND TRUTH IS A THING NOT OF THE EYE ALONE--BUT OF THE NIGHT-DARK SOUL!"

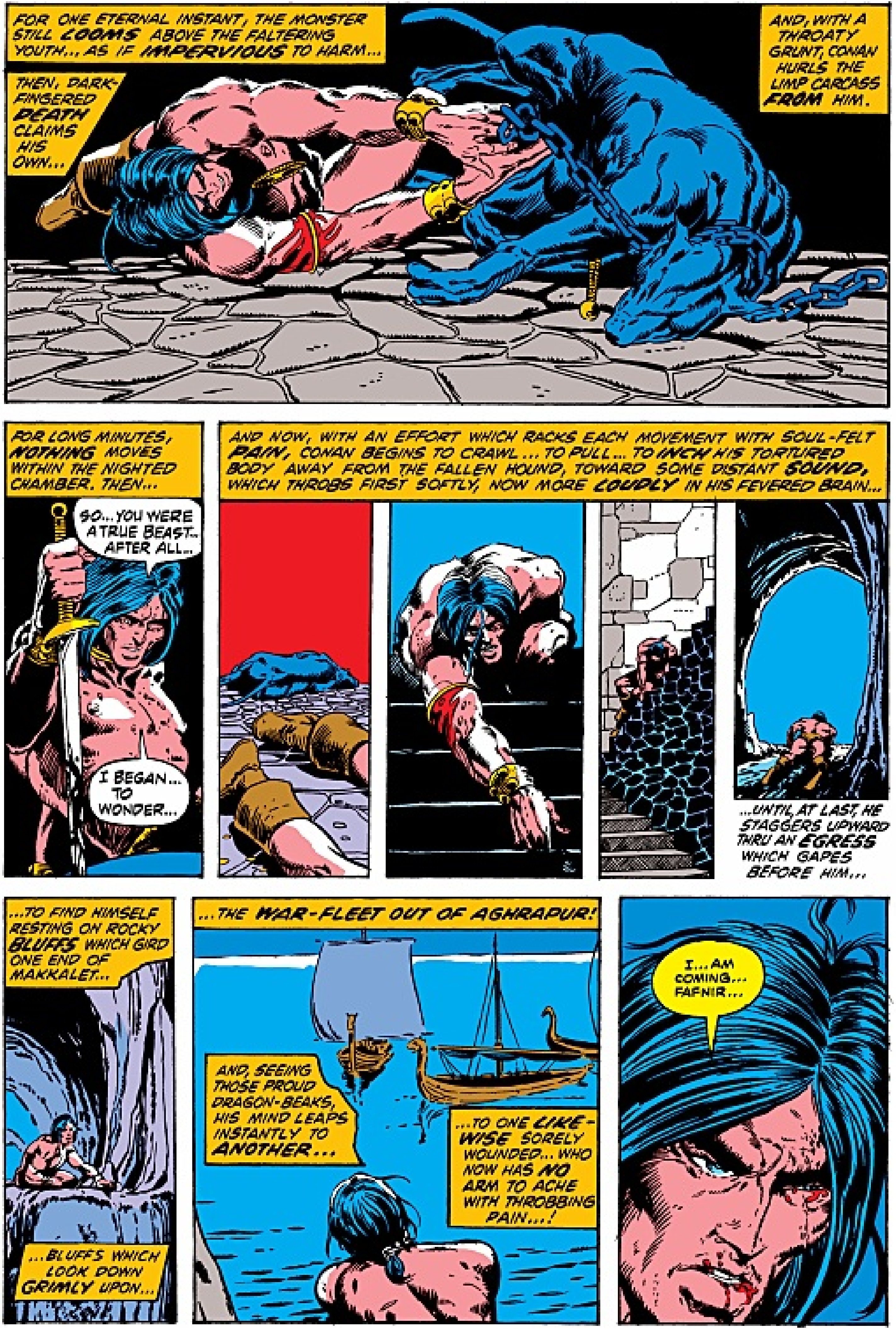

BY CROM! WHAT HAVE I STUMBLED INTO?
MIRRORS...!
THE DEVIL'S WORK IS MOSTLY DONE WITH MIRRORS, IT SEEMS...
...MIRRORS WHICH SEE THRU SOFT FLESH, TO REVEAL THE GLEAMING BONE BENEATH!
HOW CAN TURANIAN STEEL EVER HOPE TO PREVAIL AGAINST SUCH SORCERY?
A QUERY NOT REPLIED TO...
...OR, IF SO...
...BY NAUGHT SAVE A DIMLY PERCEIVED LIGHT.
...YOU PUZZLE ME, KHARAM-AKKAD. YOUR MEN STOLE THE TARIM FOR THE KING'S GREATER GLORY...
YET EVEN WE HAVE NEVER BEEN PERMITTED TO SEE HIM!
IT IS... FORBIDDEN, MAJESTY.
FORBIDDEN BY WHOM, PRIEST?
THAT IS WHAT I CAME HERE TO LEARN, AND I SHALL NOT LEAVE UNTIL--
WAIT!
I CANNOT, MAJESTY.
I HEAR A TINKLING OF BELLS...
THEY PLAY A TUNE WHICH I ALONE CAN TRULY SAVOR.
A MOST CLEAR AND PLEASANT DIRGE.
CONAN, TOO, HAS HEARD THE TINY, ELUSIVE BELLS..
...BELLS WHICH SEEM TO DANCE INVISIBLY BEFORE HIM, AS HE DRAWS NEAR THE SHIMMERING LIGHT.
AND NOW, HE STEPS INTO THE TWILIGHT OF A VAST CHAMBER, LINED ALL ABOUT WITH MIRRORS WHICH FOLD REALITY BACK UPON ITSELF.
MIRRORS: AND IN THE CENTER, A RAISED DAIS.
UPON IT, A GREAT THRONE-LIKE CHAIR, ON WHICH AN UNSEEN FIGURE SITS... AND STIRS.


CONAN'S OWN HUSHED BREATHING IS THE LOUDEST SOUND IN THE CHAMBER, AS HE STRIDES FORWARD... SLOWLY, UNSURELY, YET FOR ALL THAT LIKE SOME SLEEK NORTHERN PANTHER.
SOMEHOW... HE CANNOT KNOW HOW... HE IS CERTAIN IT IS THE TARIM INCARNATE... THE CAPTIVE MAN-GOD FOR WHOM A WAR RAGES... WHO SITS THAT MARBLE DAIS.
BUT WHETHER A MAN MAY DIE FOR DARING TO LOOK UPON A GOD... THAT, CONAN CANNOT SAY.
AND SO, SWORD RAISED...
...HE STEPS CLOSER...
CLOSER...
HE PARTS HIS LIPS TO SPEAK...!
AT THE FIRST WHISPERED SYLLABLE...
...THE MIRRORED FLOOR BECOMES A GREAT AND BESTIAL MAW...
...AND THERE IS SILENCE ONCE MORE IN THE TEMPLE OF MAKKALET.
SILENCE, TOO, IN THE STYGIAN DARKNESS BELOW...
...WHERE EVEN MIND-WRENCHING PAIN COMES TO CONAN NO MORE SWIFTLY...
...THAN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE IS NOT ALONE!

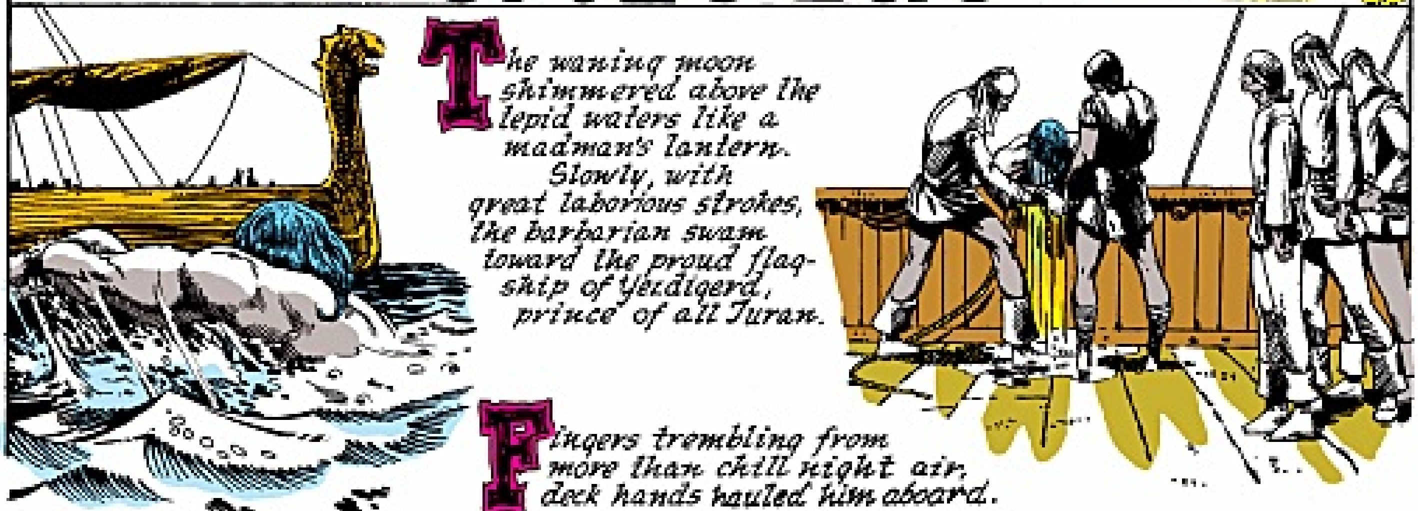

HE STANDS... STOLEN BLADE ONCE MORE AT THE READY...
THEN: AN OMINOUS SNARL...
RR
DRRRRR
AND CONAN REMEMBERS...
SO, BARBARIAN --YOU HAVE GONE THE WAY OF YOUR TWO TURANIAN COMRADES--
...REMEMBERS THE WORDS OF THE GAUNT GREY PRIEST...
RRRRR
--THE WAY OF--
--THE BLACK HOUND!
WITH THE FORCE OF A THUNDERING CHARIOT, THE GREAT BEAST HURLS HIMSELF UPON A STARTLED CONAN...
...WHO MOVES...
...THOUGH NOT QUITE SWIFTLY ENOUGH!
BUT...
DESPERATION MAKES HEROES OF US ALL...


THEN, EVEN AS BEAR-TRAP JAWS FASTEN THEMSELVES GREEDILY UPON HIS UPPER ARM...
...THE CIMMERIAN, BY SHEER STRENGTH OF SINEW AND OF WILL, PULLS HIMSELF AROUND...
...TILL HE IS ATOP THE FROTHING, WRITHING DEVIL-HOUND!
THEN, WITH A MIGHTY JERK WHICH RENDS FLESH AND FANG ALIKE...
CONAN IS FREE!
FREE, AND LUNGING FOR HIS SWORD...
...GRASPING IT...
...EVEN AS THREE HUNDRED POUNDS OF NIGH-RABID FURY COMES HURTLING TOWARD HIM...
...TO IMPALE ITSELF HUNGRILY UPON A MAN-MADE TALON!
WITH A SINGLE SURGE OF MOTION, CONAN FLINGS THE RAVENOUS THING FROM HIM...
BUT, THOUGH WOUNDED TO THE QUICK, IT DOES NOT DIE!
IT TURNS--AS CONAN'S FINGERS CLOSE AROUND THE FETTERS BENEATH HIS LEG--


...AND TURNING--LEAPS!
BUT, SWIFT THOUGH THE PAIN-MADDENED BEAST MAY BE-- THIS TIME, THE MAN IS SWIFTER YET!
WHIPLIKE, THE LENGTH OF CHAIN CURLS AND LOOPS AROUND ITS MASSIVE NECK...
AND NOW-- THE BATTLE TRULY BEGINS!
STRIVING TO IGNORE THE AGONY DEALT BY RAKING CLAWS, CONAN GRASPS ONE END OF THE CHAIN IN EITHER HAND...
...PULLING IT, LIKE SOME GREAT METAL NOOSE, TIGHTER... TIGHTER...!
THE DEVIL-BRUTE'S BREATHING IS LABORED NOW--ITS SAVAGE SNARLS HAVE CEASED -- IT KNOWS THAT IT IS NEAR TO DEATH--
BUT STILL, THOSE SLAVERING JAWS DRAW NEARER, EVER NEARER THE MAN'S THROAT...!
ALL CONAN CAN SEE IS THE BLACK OF THE HOUND--
-- AND THE HILT OF HIS SWORD!
ONE FINAL TUG-- THEN SUDDENLY HE DROPS ONE END OF THE CHAIN...
A MIGHTY HAND SEEKS OUT THE DEEP-IMBEDDED BLADE...
...AND IMBEDS IT...
...MORE DEEPLY STILL!

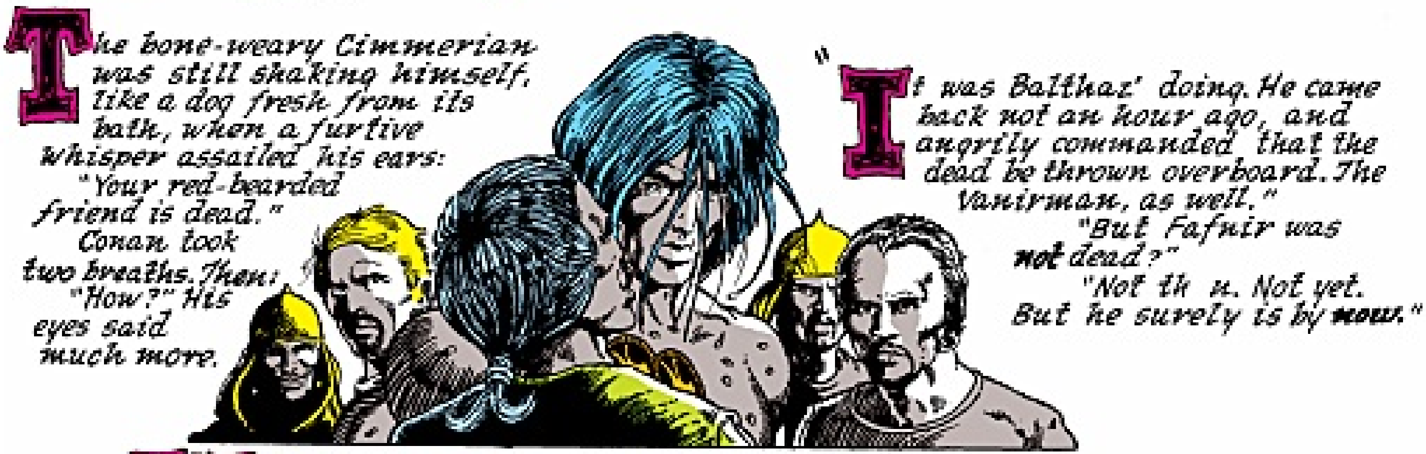

FOR ONE ETERNAL INSTANT, THE MONSTER STILL LOOMS ABOVE THE FALTERING YOUTH... AS IF IMPERVIOUS TO HARM...
THEN, DARK-FINGERED DEATH CLAIMS HIS OWN...
AND, WITH A THROATY GRUNT, CONAN HURLS THE LIMP CARCASS FROM HIM.
FOR LONG MINUTES, NOTHING MOVES WITHIN THE NIGHTED CHAMBER. THEN...
SO... YOU WERE A TRUE BEAST... AFTER ALL...
I BEGAN... TO WONDER...
AND NOW, WITH AN EFFORT WHICH RACKS EACH MOVEMENT WITH SOUL-FELT PAIN, CONAN BEGINS TO CRAWL... TO PULL... TO INCH HIS TORTURED BODY AWAY FROM THE FALLEN HOUND, TOWARD SOME DISTANT SOUND, WHICH THROBS FIRST SOFTLY, NOW MORE LOUDLY IN HIS FEVERED BRAIN...
...UNTIL, AT LAST, HE STAGGERS UPWARD THRU AN EGRESS WHICH GAPES BEFORE HIM...
...TO FIND HIMSELF RESTING ON ROCKY BLUFFS WHICH GIRD ONE END OF MAKKALET...
...BLUFFS WHICH LOOK DOWN GRIMLY UPON...
...THE WAR-FLEET OUT OF AGHRAPUR!
AND, SEEING THOSE PROUD DRAGON-BEAKS, HIS MIND LEAPS INSTANTLY TO ANOTHER...
...TO ONE LIKEWISE SORELY WOUNDED... WHO NOW HAS NO ARM TO ACHE WITH THROBBING PAIN...!
I... AM COMING... FAFNIR...

•EPILOGUE•



The waning moon shimmered above the tepid waters like a madman's lantern. Slowly, with great laborious strokes, the barbarian swam toward the proud flagship of Yezdigerd, prince of all Turan.

Fingers trembling from more than chill night air, deck hands hauled him aboard.



The bone-weary Cimmerian was still shaking himself, like a dog fresh from its bath, when a furtive whisper assailed his ears:

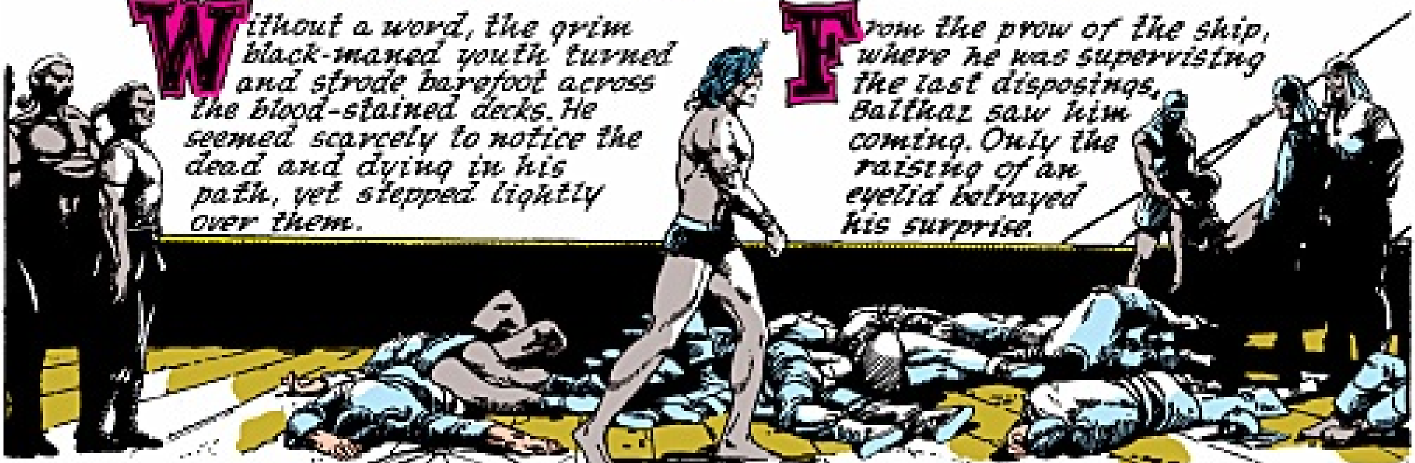
"Your red-bearded friend is dead."

Conan took two breaths. Then: "How?" His eyes said much more.

"It was Balthaz' doing. He came back not an hour ago, and angrily commanded that the dead be thrown overboard. The Vanirman, as well."

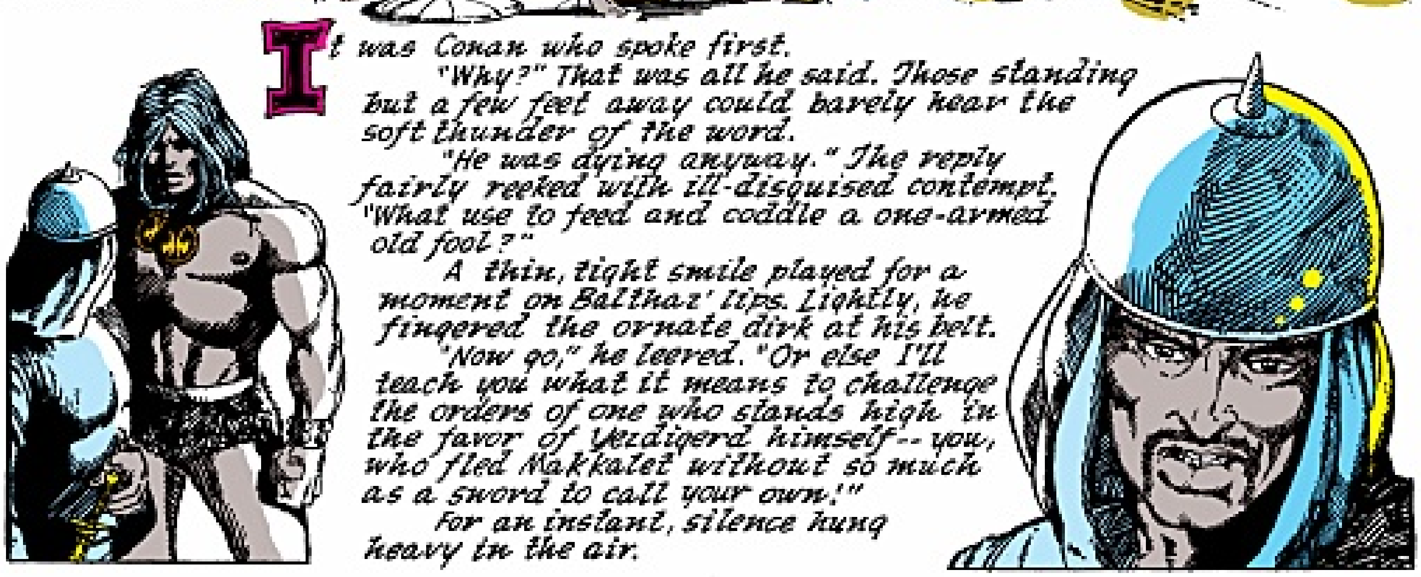
"But Fafnir was **not** dead?"

"Not then. Not yet. But he surely is by **now**."



Without a word, the grim black-maned youth turned and strode barefoot across the blood-stained decks. He seemed scarcely to notice the dead and dying in his path, yet stepped lightly over them.

From the prow of the ship, where he was supervising the last disposings, Balthaz saw him coming. Only the raising of an eyelid betrayed his surprise.



It was Conan who spoke first.

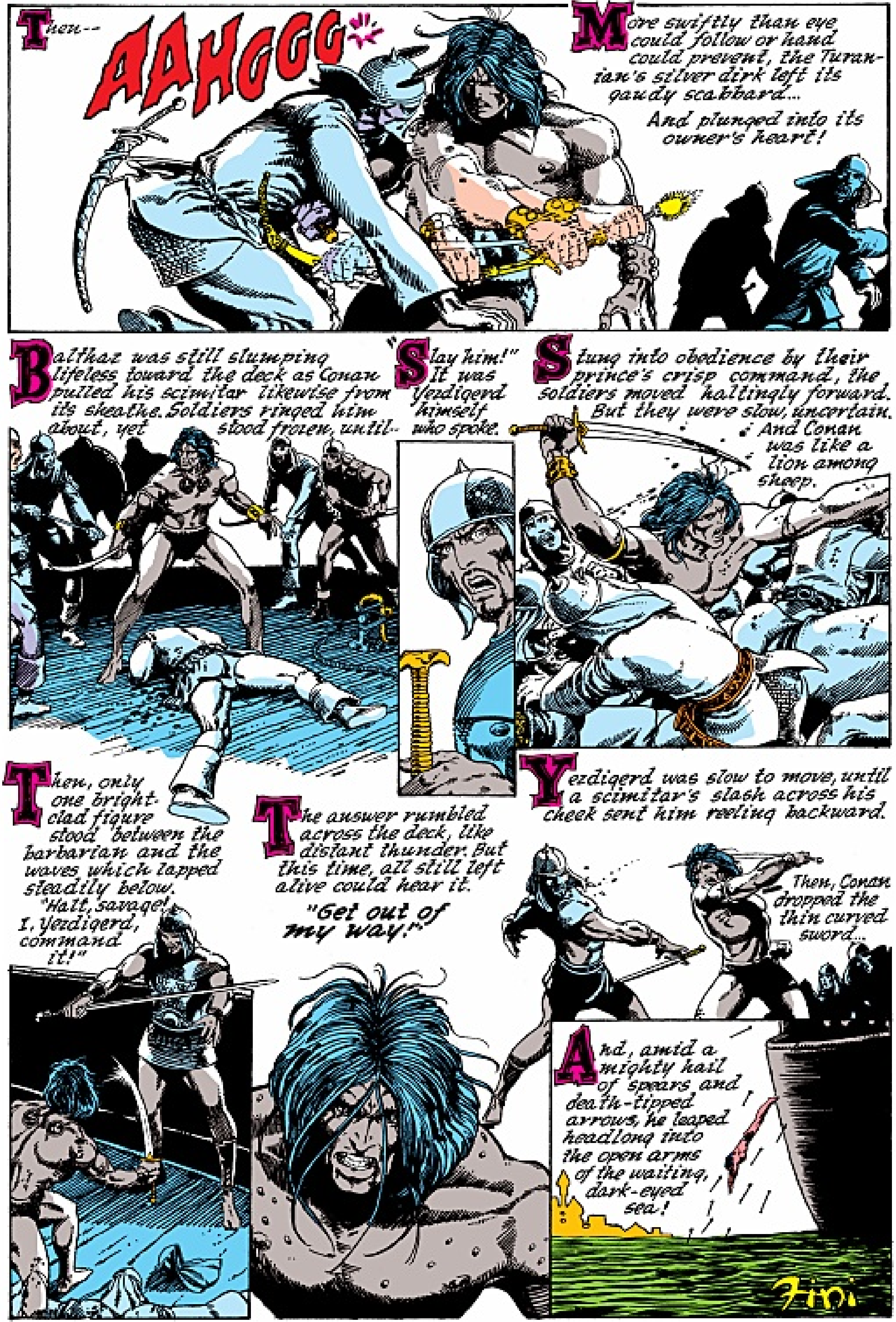
"Why?" That was all he said. Those standing but a few feet away could barely hear the soft thunder of the word.

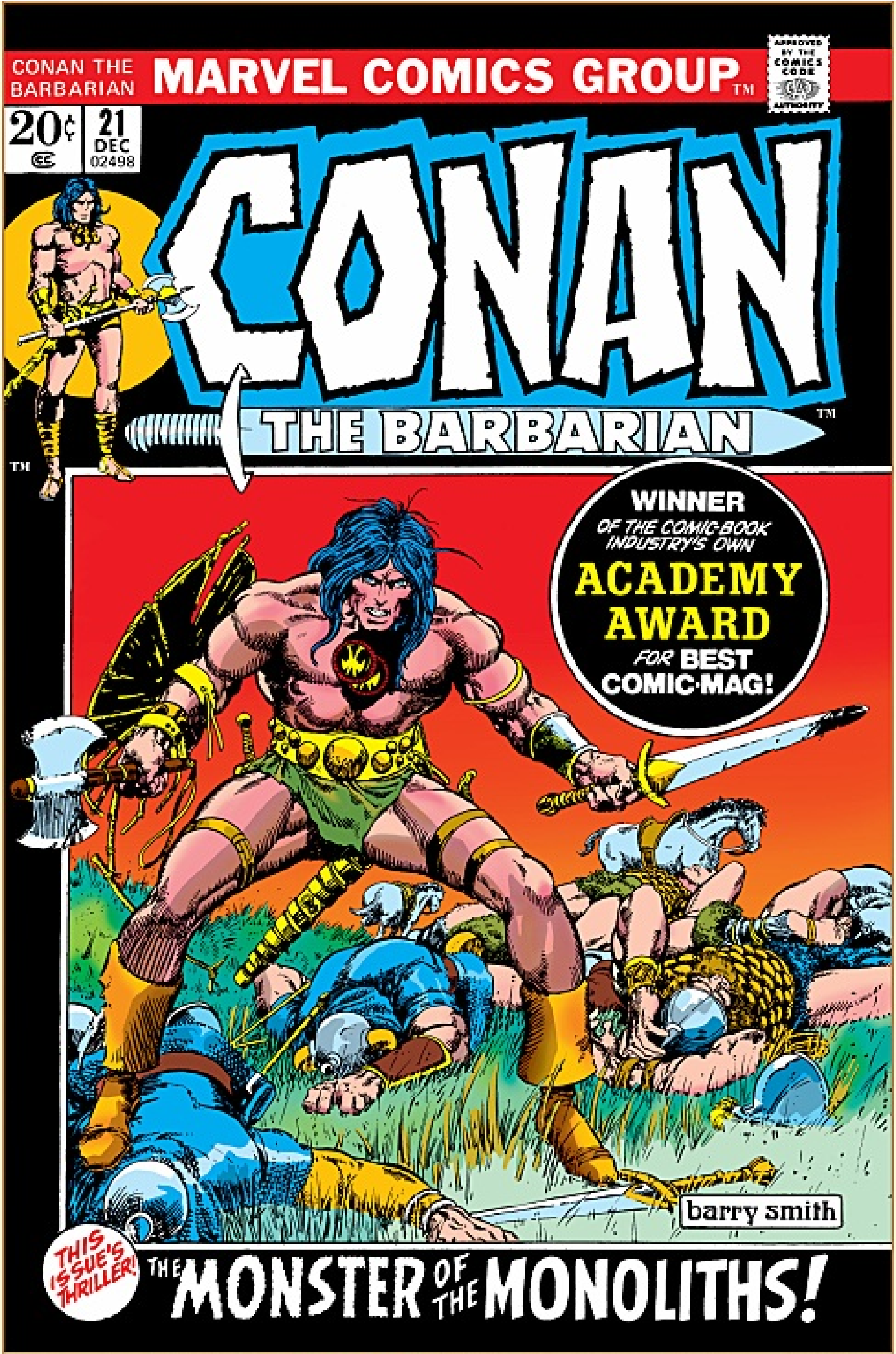
"He was dying anyway." The reply fairly reeked with ill-disguised contempt. "What use to feed and coddle a one-armed old fool?"

A thin, tight smile played for a moment on Balthaz' lips. Lightly, he fingered the ornate dirk at his belt.

"Now go," he leered. "Or else I'll teach you what it means to challenge the orders of one who stands high in the favor of Yezdigerd himself-- you, who fled Makkalet without so much as a sword to call your own!"

For an instant, silence hung heavy in the air.


Then--
AAHGGG!
More swiftly than eye could follow or hand could prevent, the Turanian's silver dirk left its gaudy scabbard...
And plunged into its owner's heart!
Balthaz was still slumping lifeless toward the deck as Conan pulled his scimitar likewise from its sheathe. Soldiers ringed him about, yet stood frozen, until--
"Slay him!" It was Yezdigerd himself who spoke.
Stung into obedience by their prince's crisp command, the soldiers moved haltingly forward. But they were slow, uncertain. And Conan was like a lion among sheep.
Then, only one bright-clad figure stood between the barbarian and the waves which lapped steadily below.
"Halt, savage! I, Yezdigerd, command it!"
The answer rumbled across the deck, like distant thunder. But this time, all still left alive could hear it.
"Get out of my way!"
Yezdigerd was slow to move, until a scimitar's slash across his cheek sent him reeling backward.
Then, Conan dropped the thin curved sword...
And, amid a mighty hail of spears and death-tipped arrows, he leaped headlong into the open arms of the waiting, dark-eyed sea!
Fini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THIS ISSUE'S THRILLER!
THE MONSTER OF THE MONOLITHS!

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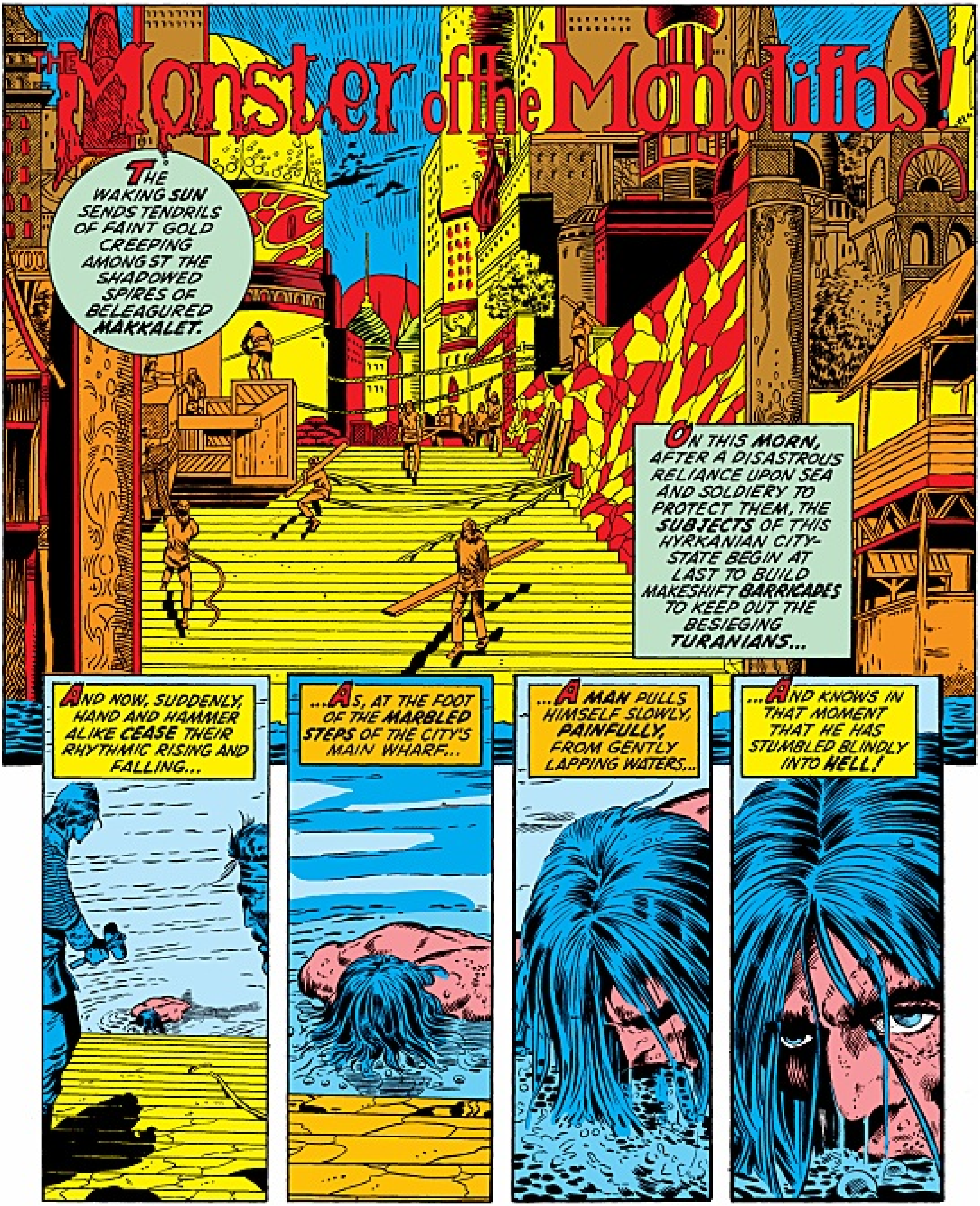
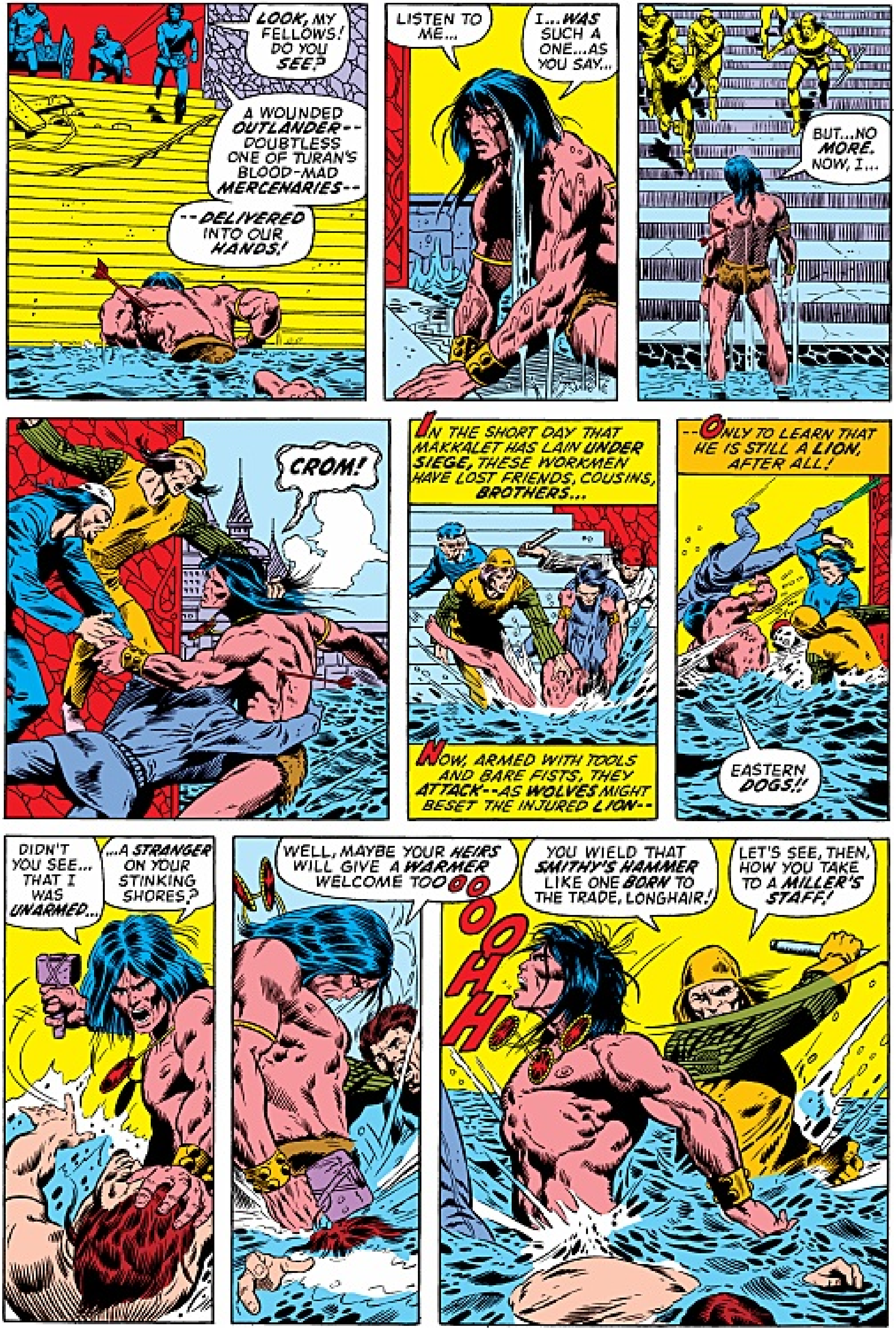
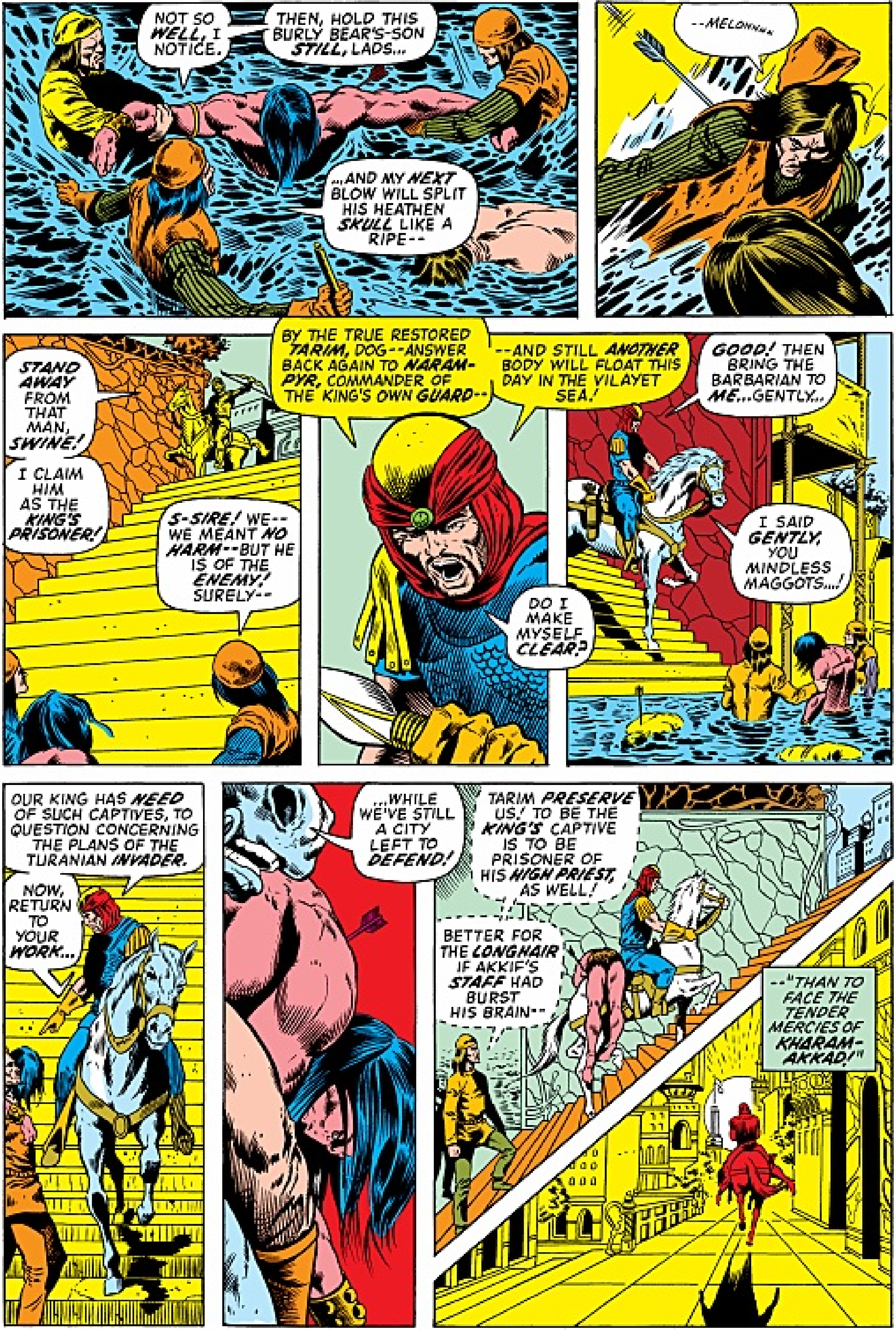
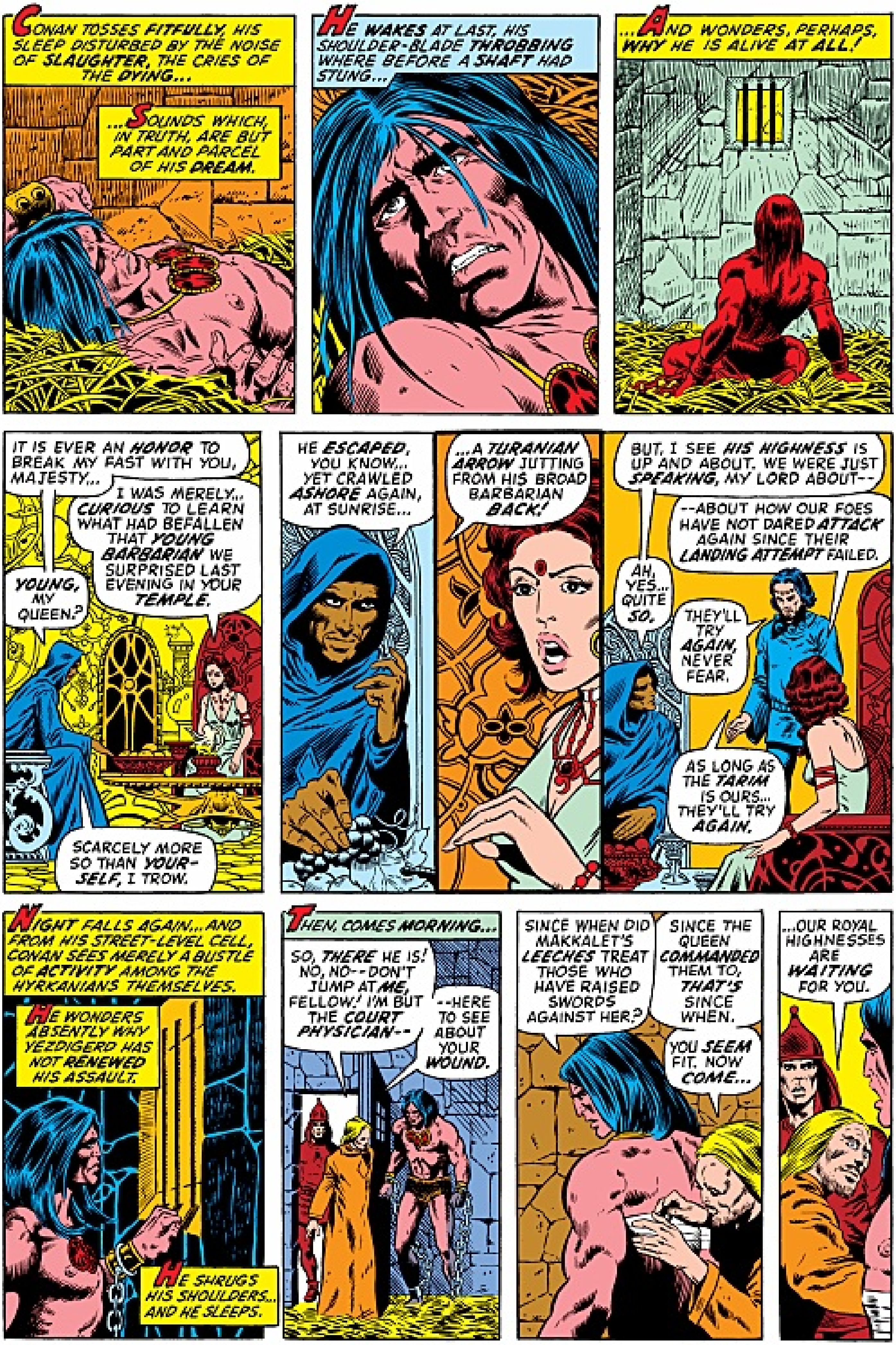
CONAN THE BARBARIAN™

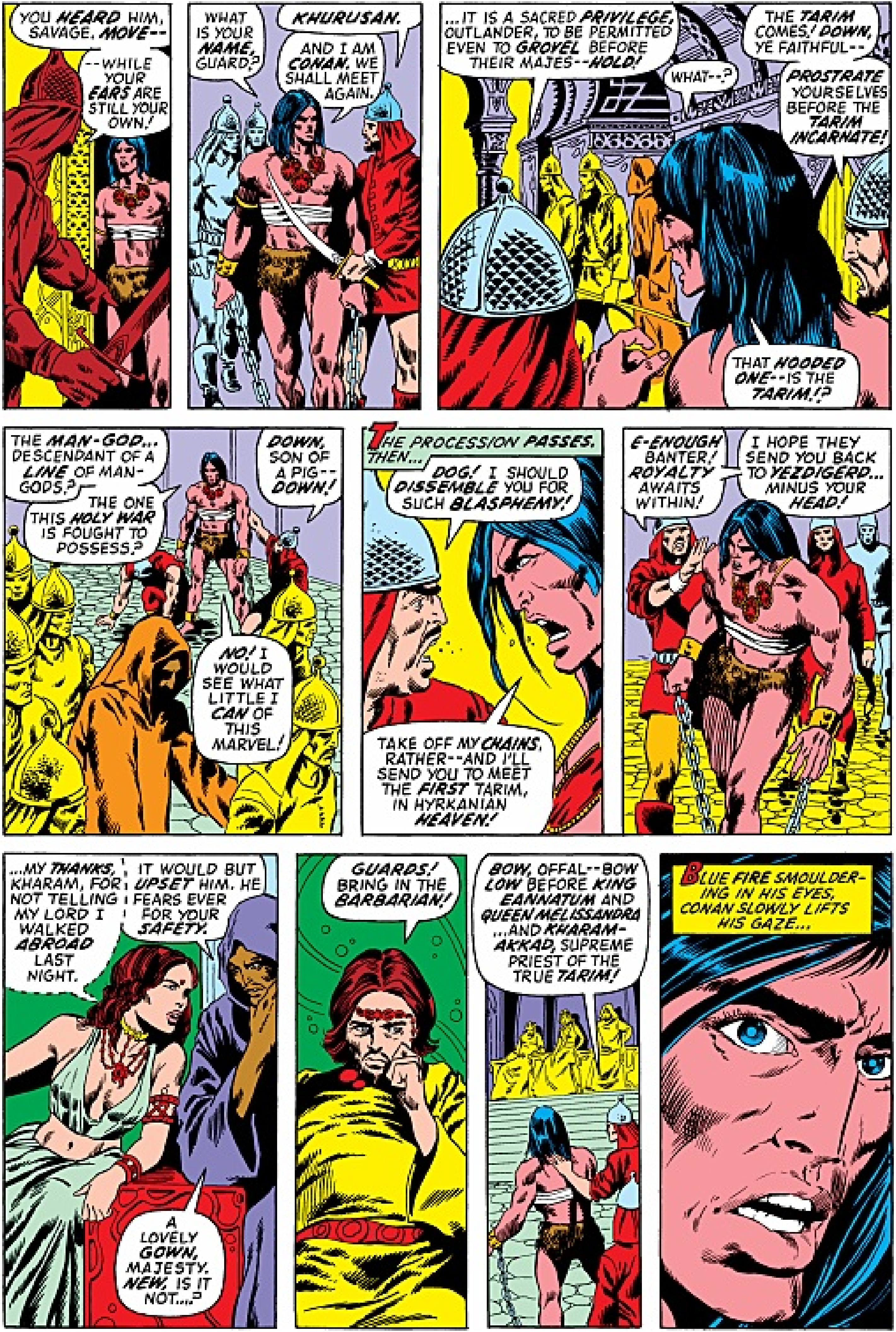
ROY THOMAS *WRITER/EDITOR* and **BARRY SMITH** *LAYOUTS* * **DAN ADKINS** & **CRAIG RUSSELL** & **VAL MAYERIK** & **SAL BUSCEMA** *EMBELLISHERS ALL!* * **ARTIE SIMEK** *LETTERER* * *INSPIRED IN PART BY THE STORY* **"THE BLACK STONE"** by ROBERT E. HOWARD, creator of Conan

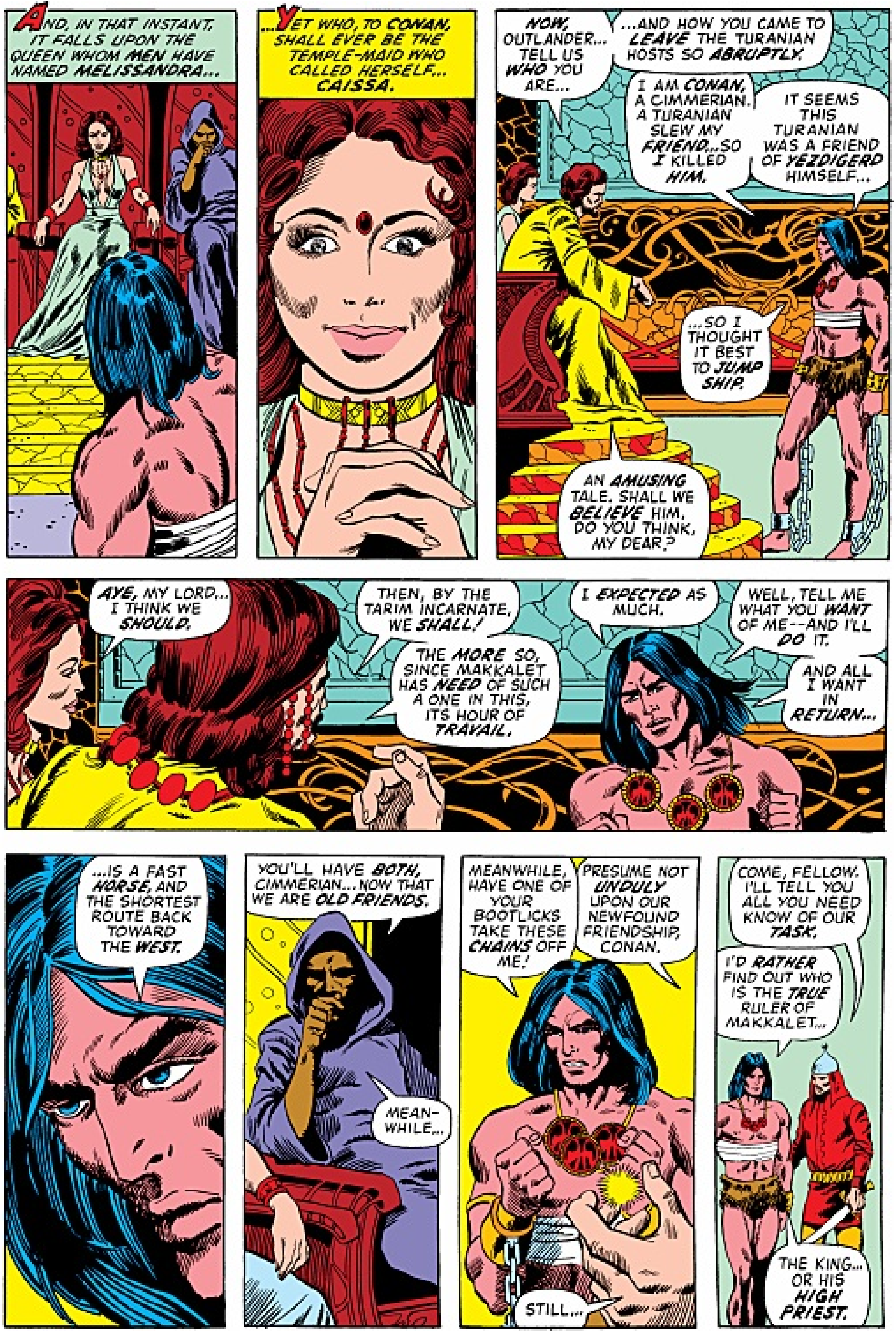

THE MONSTER OF THE MONOLITHS!
THE WAKING SUN SENDS TENDRILS OF FAINT GOLD CREEPING AMONGST THE SHADOWED SPIRES OF BELEAGURED MAKKALET.
ON THIS MORN, AFTER A DISASTROUS RELIANCE UPON SEA AND SOLDIERY TO PROTECT THEM, THE SUBJECTS OF THIS HYRKANIAN CITY-STATE BEGIN AT LAST TO BUILD MAKESHIFT BARRICADES TO KEEP OUT THE BESIEGING TURANIANS...
AND NOW, SUDDENLY, HAND AND HAMMER ALIKE CEASE THEIR RHYTHMIC RISING AND FALLING...
...AS, AT THE FOOT OF THE MARBLED STEPS OF THE CITY'S MAIN WHARF...
...A MAN PULLS HIMSELF SLOWLY, PAINFULLY, FROM GENTLY LAPPING WATERS...
...AND KNOWS IN THAT MOMENT THAT HE HAS STUMBLED BLINDLY INTO HELL!

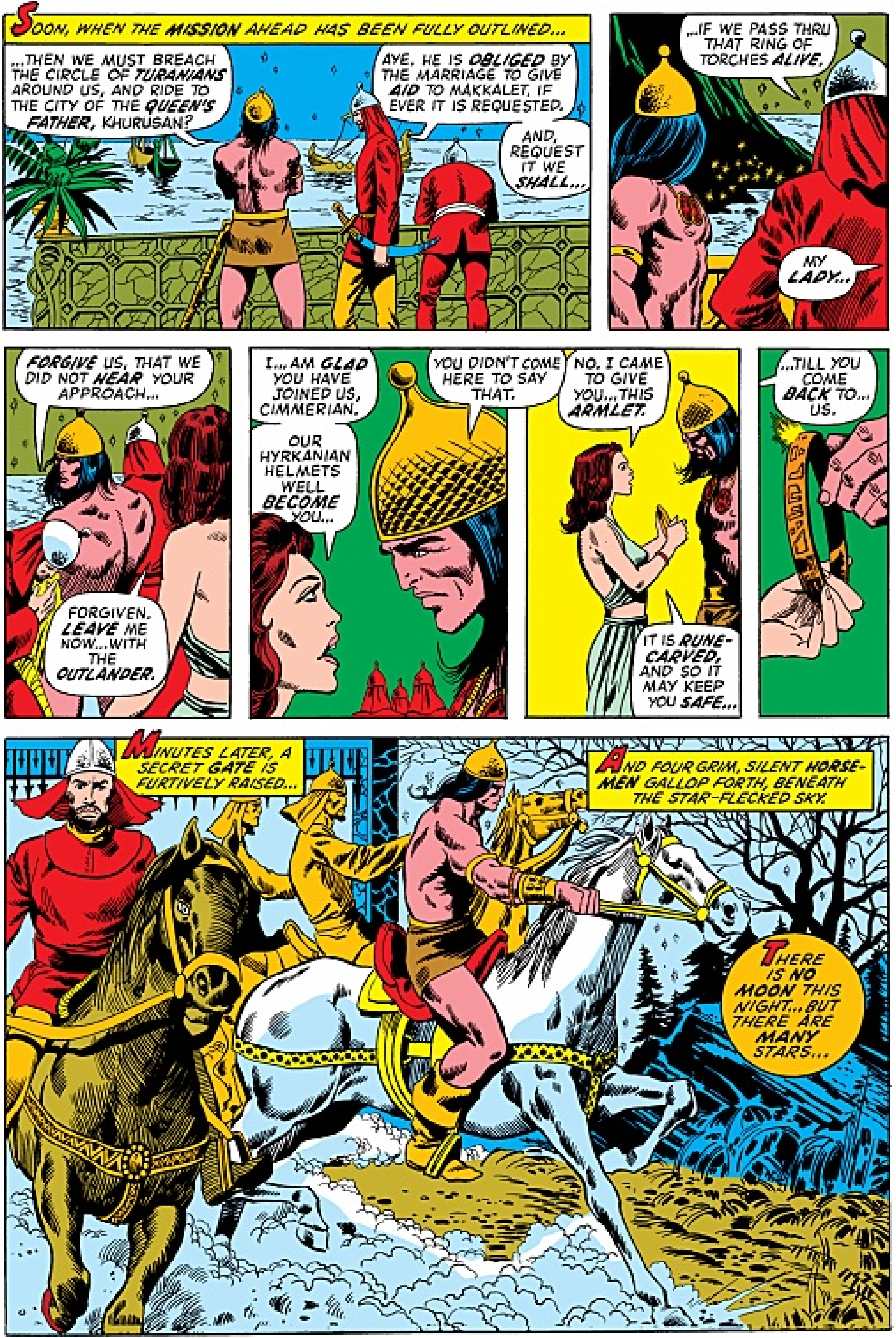

LOOK, MY FELLOWS! DO YOU SEE?
A WOUNDED OUTLANDER-- DOUBTLESS ONE OF TURAN'S BLOOD-MAD MERCENARIES--
--DELIVERED INTO OUR HANDS!
LISTEN TO ME...
I...WAS SUCH A ONE...AS YOU SAY...
BUT...NO MORE. NOW, I...
CROM!
IN THE SHORT DAY THAT MAKKALET HAS LAIN UNDER SIEGE, THESE WORKMEN HAVE LOST FRIENDS, COUSINS, BROTHERS...
NOW, ARMED WITH TOOLS AND BARE FISTS, THEY ATTACK--AS WOLVES MIGHT BESET THE INJURED LION--
--ONLY TO LEARN THAT HE IS STILL A LION, AFTER ALL!
EASTERN DOGS!!
DIDN'T YOU SEE... THAT I WAS UNARMED...
...A STRANGER ON YOUR STINKING SHORES?
WELL, MAYBE YOUR HEIRS WILL GIVE A WARMER WELCOME TOO
OOOOHH
YOU WIELD THAT SMITHY'S HAMMER LIKE ONE BORN TO THE TRADE, LONGHAIR!
LET'S SEE, THEN, HOW YOU TAKE TO A MILLER'S STAFF!

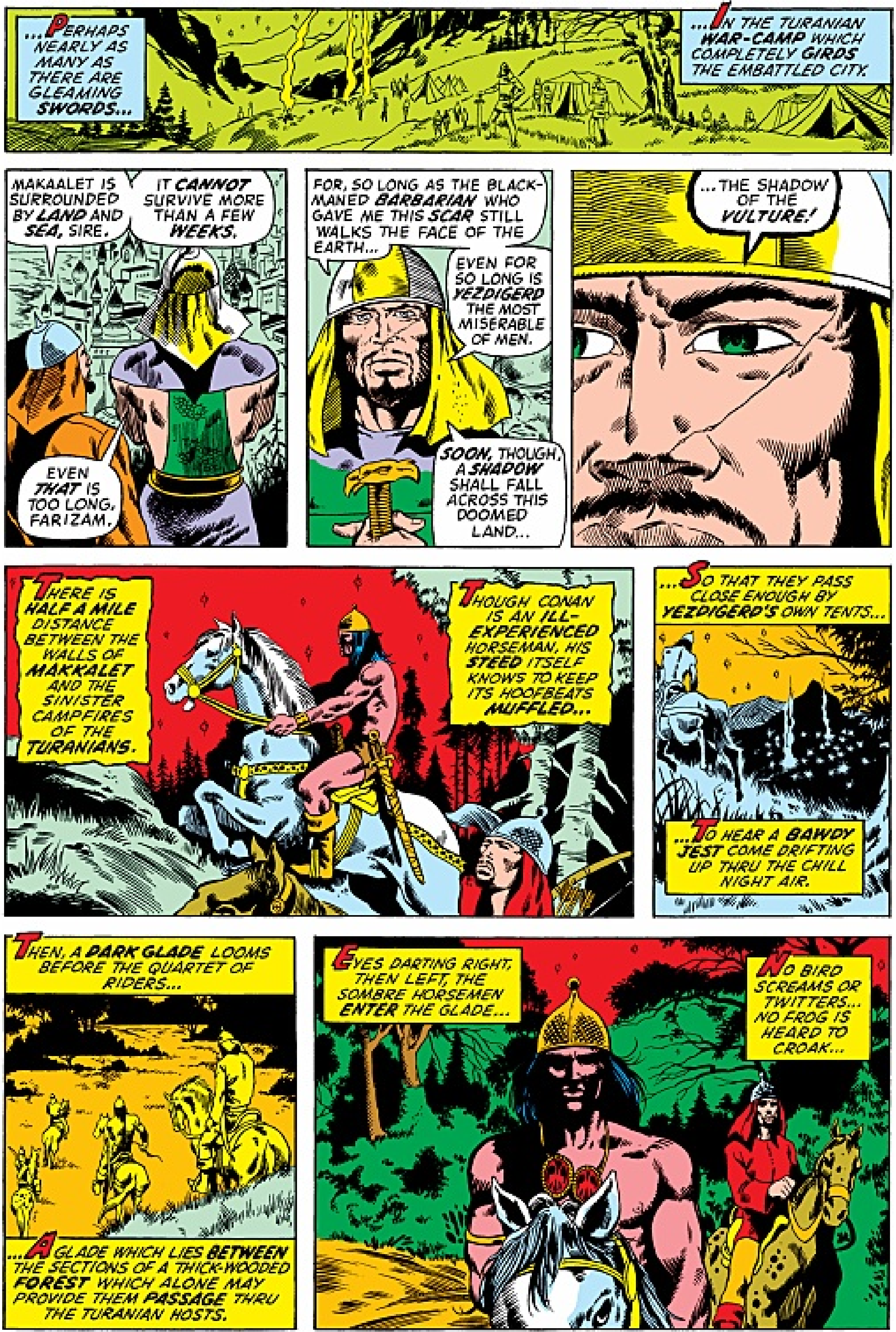

NOT SO WELL, I NOTICE.
THEN, HOLD THIS BURLY BEAR'S-SON STILL, LADS...
...AND MY NEXT BLOW WILL SPLIT HIS HEATHEN SKULL LIKE A RIPE--
--MELONNN
STAND AWAY FROM THAT MAN, SWINE!
I CLAIM HIM AS THE KING'S PRISONER!
S-SIRE! WE--WE MEANT NO HARM--BUT HE IS OF THE ENEMY! SURELY--
BY THE TRUE RESTORED TARIM, DOG--ANSWER BACK AGAIN TO NARAM-PYR, COMMANDER OF THE KING'S OWN GUARD--
--AND STILL ANOTHER BODY WILL FLOAT THIS DAY IN THE VILAYET SEA!
DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?
GOOD! THEN BRING THE BARBARIAN TO ME...GENTLY...
I SAID GENTLY, YOU MINDLESS MAGGOTS...!
OUR KING HAS NEED OF SUCH CAPTIVES, TO QUESTION CONCERNING THE PLANS OF THE TURANIAN INVADER.
NOW, RETURN TO YOUR WORK...
...WHILE WE'VE STILL A CITY LEFT TO DEFEND!
TARIM PRESERVE US! TO BE THE KING'S CAPTIVE IS TO BE PRISONER OF HIS HIGH PRIEST, AS WELL!
BETTER FOR THE LONGHAIR IF AKKIF'S STAFF HAD BURST HIS BRAIN--
--"THAN TO FACE THE TENDER MERCIES OF KHARAM-AKKAD!"

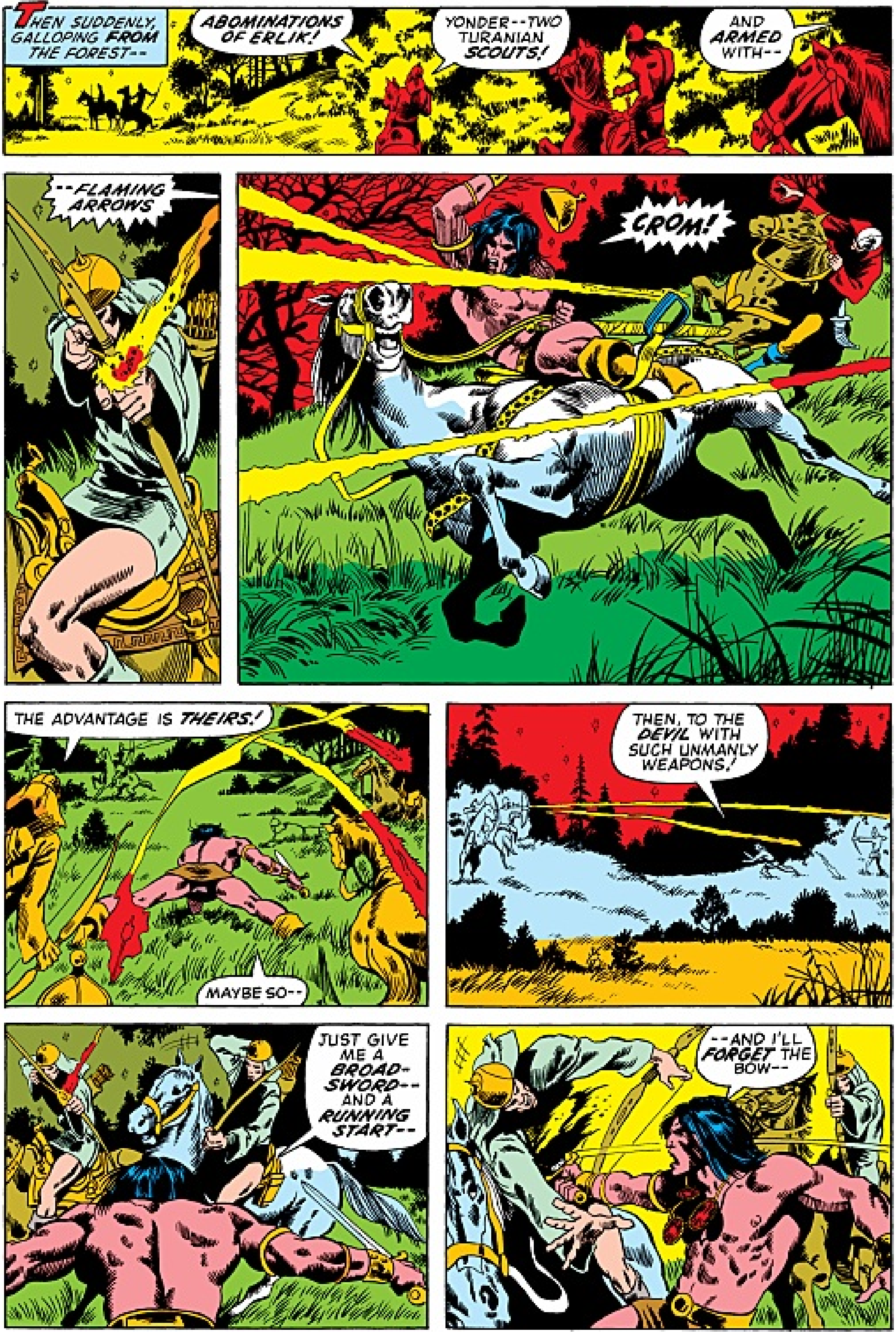

CONAN TOSSES FITFULLY, HIS SLEEP DISTURBED BY THE NOISE OF SLAUGHTER, THE CRIES OF THE DYING...
...SOUNDS WHICH, IN TRUTH, ARE BUT PART AND PARCEL OF HIS DREAM.
HE WAKES AT LAST, HIS SHOULDER-BLADE THROBBING WHERE BEFORE A SHAFT HAD STUNG...
...AND WONDERS, PERHAPS, WHY HE IS ALIVE AT ALL!
IT IS EVER AN HONOR TO BREAK MY FAST WITH YOU, MAJESTY...
I WAS MERELY... CURIOUS TO LEARN WHAT HAD BEFALLEN THAT YOUNG BARBARIAN WE SURPRISED LAST EVENING IN YOUR TEMPLE.
YOUNG, MY QUEEN?
SCARCELY MORE SO THAN YOURSELF, I TROW.
HE ESCAPED, YOU KNOW... YET CRAWLED ASHORE AGAIN, AT SUNRISE...
...A TURANIAN ARROW JUTTING FROM HIS BROAD BARBARIAN BACK!
BUT, I SEE HIS HIGHNESS IS UP AND ABOUT. WE WERE JUST SPEAKING, MY LORD ABOUT--
--ABOUT HOW OUR FOES HAVE NOT DARED ATTACK AGAIN SINCE THEIR LANDING ATTEMPT FAILED.
AH, YES... QUITE SO.
THEY'LL TRY AGAIN, NEVER FEAR.
AS LONG AS THE TARIM IS OURS... THEY'LL TRY AGAIN.
NIGHT FALLS AGAIN... AND FROM HIS STREET-LEVEL CELL, CONAN SEES MERELY A BUSTLE OF ACTIVITY AMONG THE HYRKANIANS THEMSELVES.
HE WONDERS ABSENTLY WHY YEZDIGERD HAS NOT RENEWED HIS ASSAULT.
HE SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS... AND HE SLEEPS.
THEN, COMES MORNING...
SO, THERE HE IS! NO, NO--DON'T JUMP AT ME, FELLOW! I'M BUT THE COURT PHYSICIAN--
--HERE TO SEE ABOUT YOUR WOUND.
SINCE WHEN DID MAKKALET'S LEECHES TREAT THOSE WHO HAVE RAISED SWORDS AGAINST HER?
SINCE THE QUEEN COMMANDED THEM TO, THAT'S SINCE WHEN.
YOU SEEM FIT, NOW COME...
...OUR ROYAL HIGHNESSES ARE WAITING FOR YOU.

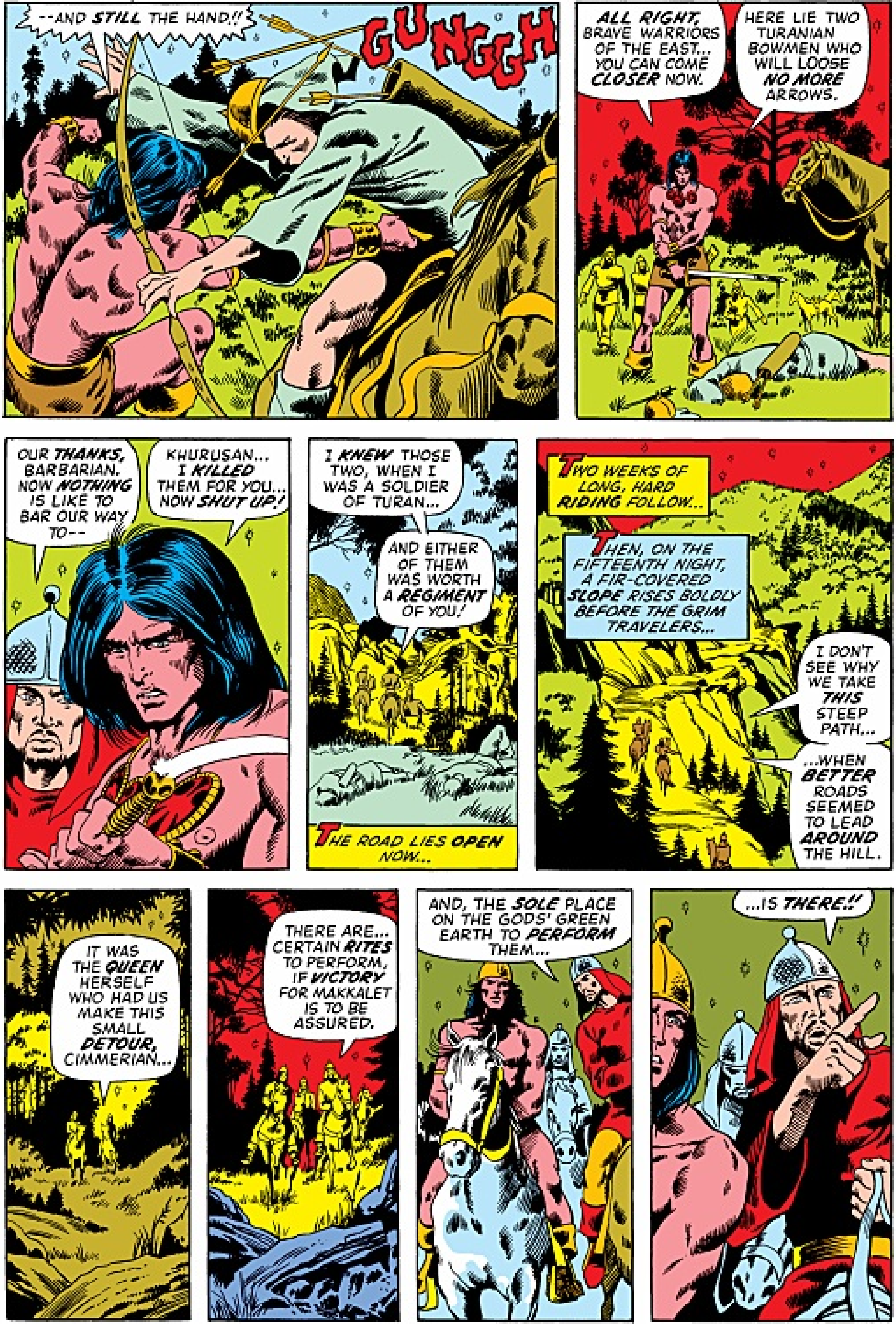

YOU HEARD HIM, SAVAGE. MOVE--
--WHILE YOUR EARS ARE STILL YOUR OWN!
WHAT IS YOUR NAME, GUARD?
KHURUSAN.
AND I AM CONAN. WE SHALL MEET AGAIN.
...IT IS A SACRED PRIVILEGE, OUTLANDER, TO BE PERMITTED EVEN TO GROVEL BEFORE THEIR MAJES--HOLD!
THE TARIM COMES! DOWN, YE FAITHFUL--
WHAT--?
PROSTRATE YOURSELVES BEFORE THE TARIM INCARNATE!
THAT HOODED ONE--IS THE TARIM!?
THE MAN-GOD... DESCENDANT OF A LINE OF MAN-GODS?
THE ONE THIS HOLY WAR IS FOUGHT TO POSSESS?
DOWN, SON OF A PIG--DOWN!
NO! I WOULD SEE WHAT LITTLE I CAN OF THIS MARVEL!
THE PROCESSION PASSES. THEN...
DOG! I SHOULD DISSEMBLE YOU FOR SUCH BLASPHEMY!
TAKE OFF MY CHAINS, RATHER--AND I'LL SEND YOU TO MEET THE FIRST TARIM, IN HYRKANIAN HEAVEN!
E-ENOUGH BANTER! ROYALTY AWAITS WITHIN!
I HOPE THEY SEND YOU BACK TO YEZDIGERD... MINUS YOUR HEAD!
...MY THANKS, KHARAM, FOR NOT TELLING MY LORD I WALKED ABROAD LAST NIGHT.
IT WOULD BUT UPSET HIM. HE FEARS EVER FOR YOUR SAFETY.
A LOVELY GOWN, MAJESTY. NEW, IS IT NOT...?
GUARDS! BRING IN THE BARBARIAN!
BOW, OFFAL--BOW LOW BEFORE KING EANNATUM AND QUEEN MELISSANDRA ...AND KHARAM-AKKAD, SUPREME PRIEST OF THE TRUE TARIM!
BLUE FIRE SMOULDERING IN HIS EYES, CONAN SLOWLY LIFTS HIS GAZE...

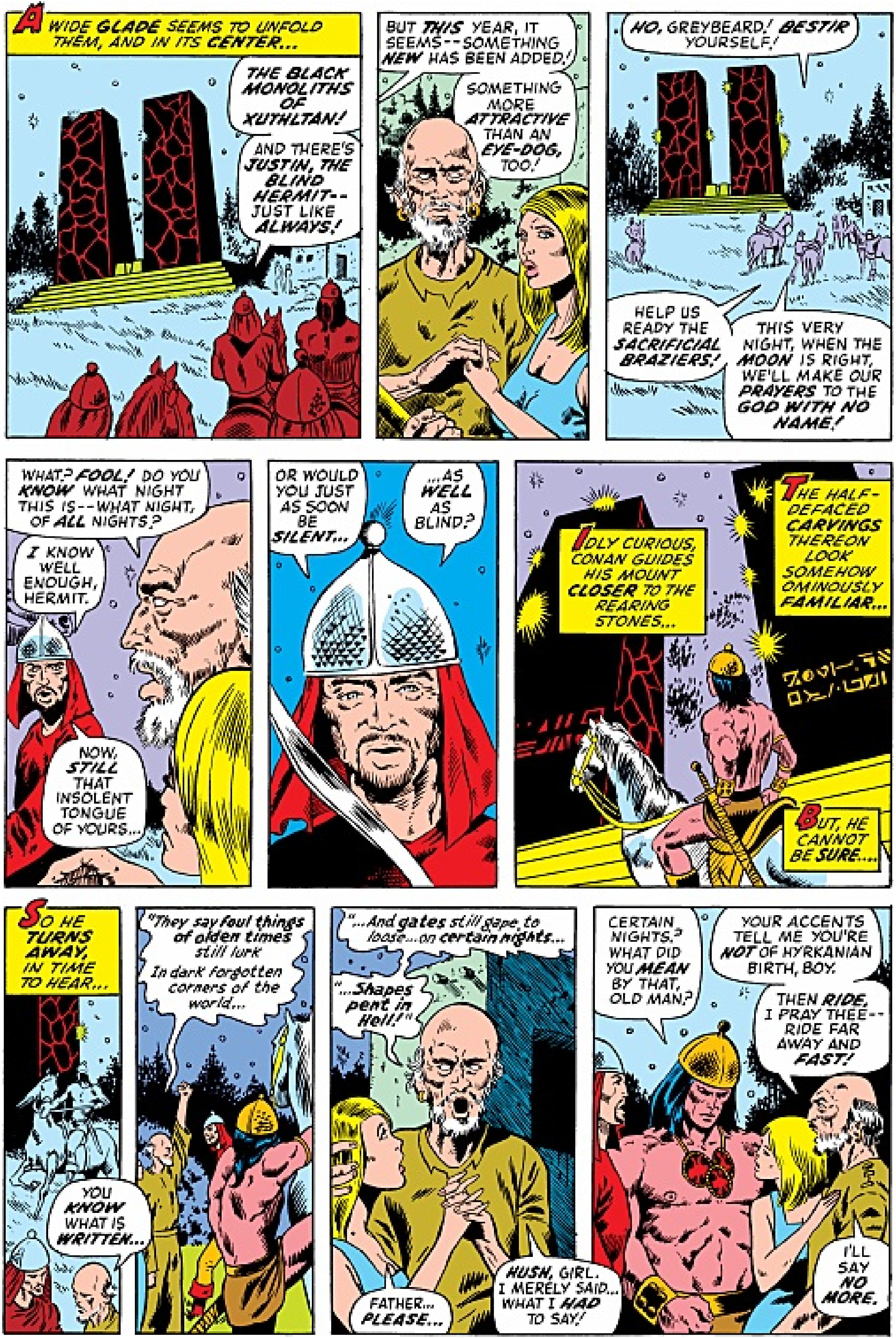

AND, IN THAT INSTANT, IT FALLS UPON THE QUEEN WHOM MEN HAVE NAMED MELISSANDRA...
...YET WHO, TO CONAN, SHALL EVER BE THE TEMPLE-MAID WHO CALLED HERSELF... CAISSA.
NOW, OUTLANDER... TELL US WHO YOU ARE...
...AND HOW YOU CAME TO LEAVE THE TURANIAN HOSTS SO ABRUPTLY.
I AM CONAN, A CIMMERIAN. A TURANIAN SLEW MY FRIEND...SO I KILLED HIM.
IT SEEMS THIS TURANIAN WAS A FRIEND OF YEZDIGERD HIMSELF...
...SO I THOUGHT IT BEST TO JUMP SHIP.
AN AMUSING TALE. SHALL WE BELIEVE HIM, DO YOU THINK, MY DEAR?
AYE, MY LORD... I THINK WE SHOULD.
THEN, BY THE TARIM INCARNATE, WE SHALL!
THE MORE SO, SINCE MAKKALET HAS NEED OF SUCH A ONE IN THIS, ITS HOUR OF TRAVAIL.
I EXPECTED AS MUCH.
WELL, TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT OF ME--AND I'LL DO IT.
AND ALL I WANT IN RETURN...
...IS A FAST HORSE, AND THE SHORTEST ROUTE BACK TOWARD THE WEST.
YOU'LL HAVE BOTH, CIMMERIAN... NOW THAT WE ARE OLD FRIENDS.
MEAN-WHILE...
MEANWHILE, HAVE ONE OF YOUR BOOTLICKS TAKE THESE CHAINS OFF ME!
PRESUME NOT UNDULY UPON OUR NEWFOUND FRIENDSHIP, CONAN.
STILL...
COME, FELLOW. I'LL TELL YOU ALL YOU NEED KNOW OF OUR TASK.
I'D RATHER FIND OUT WHO IS THE TRUE RULER OF MAKKALET...
THE KING... OR HIS HIGH PRIEST.

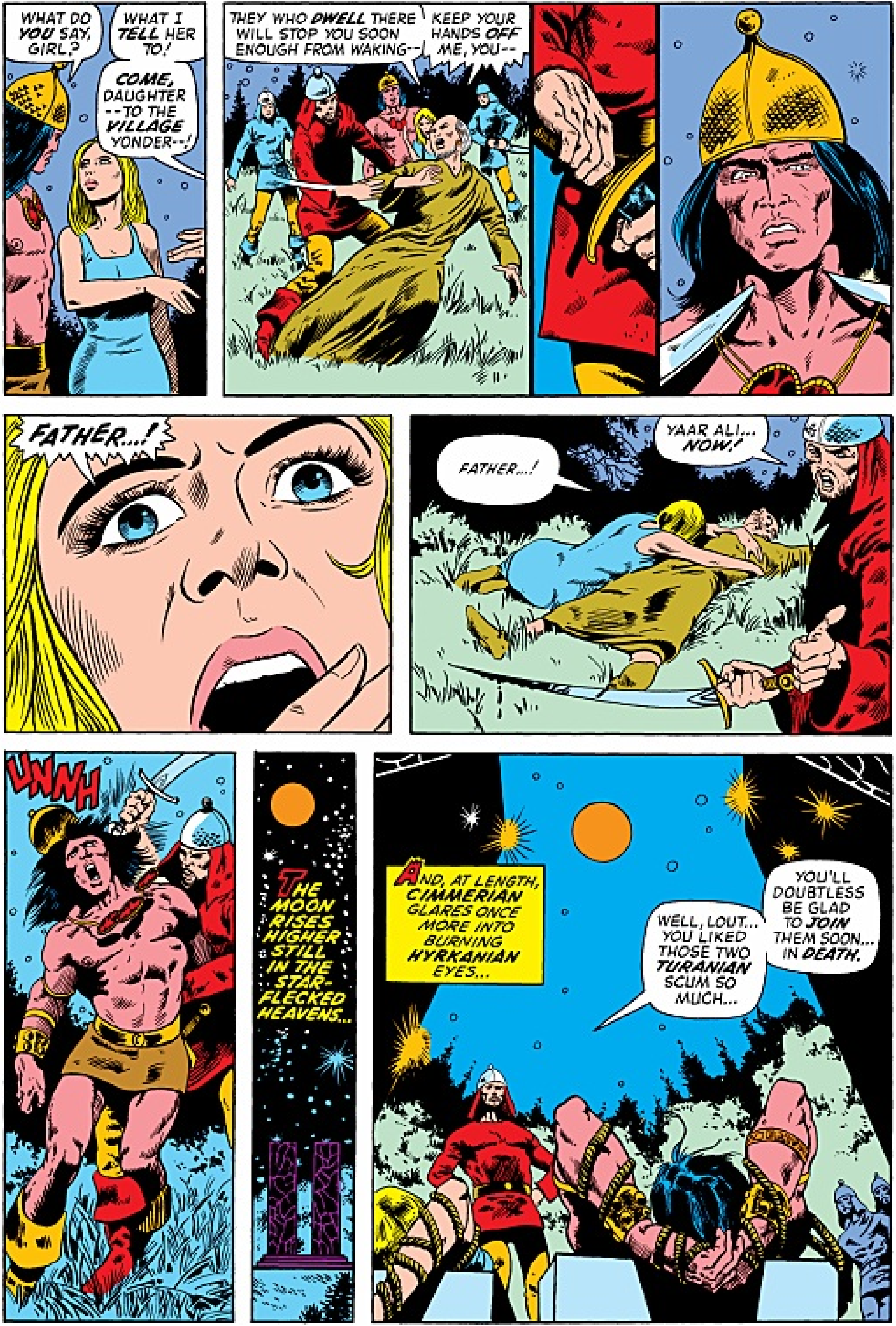

SOON, WHEN THE MISSION AHEAD HAS BEEN FULLY OUTLINED...
...THEN WE MUST BREACH THE CIRCLE OF TURANIANS AROUND US, AND RIDE TO THE CITY OF THE QUEEN'S FATHER, KHURUSAN?
AYE. HE IS OBLIGED BY THE MARRIAGE TO GIVE AID TO MAKKALET, IF EVER IT IS REQUESTED.
AND, REQUEST IT WE SHALL...
...IF WE PASS THRU THAT RING OF TORCHES ALIVE.
MY LADY...
FORGIVE US, THAT WE DID NOT HEAR YOUR APPROACH...
FORGIVEN. LEAVE ME NOW...WITH THE OUTLANDER.
I... AM GLAD YOU HAVE JOINED US, CIMMERIAN.
OUR HYRKANIAN HELMETS WELL BECOME YOU...
YOU DIDN'T COME HERE TO SAY THAT.
NO. I CAME TO GIVE YOU... THIS ARMLET.
IT IS RUNE-CARVED, AND SO IT MAY KEEP YOU SAFE...
...TILL YOU COME BACK TO... US.
MINUTES LATER, A SECRET GATE IS FURTIVELY RAISED...
AND FOUR GRIM, SILENT HORSEMEN GALLOP FORTH, BENEATH THE STAR-FLECKED SKY.
THERE IS NO MOON THIS NIGHT... BUT THERE ARE MANY STARS...

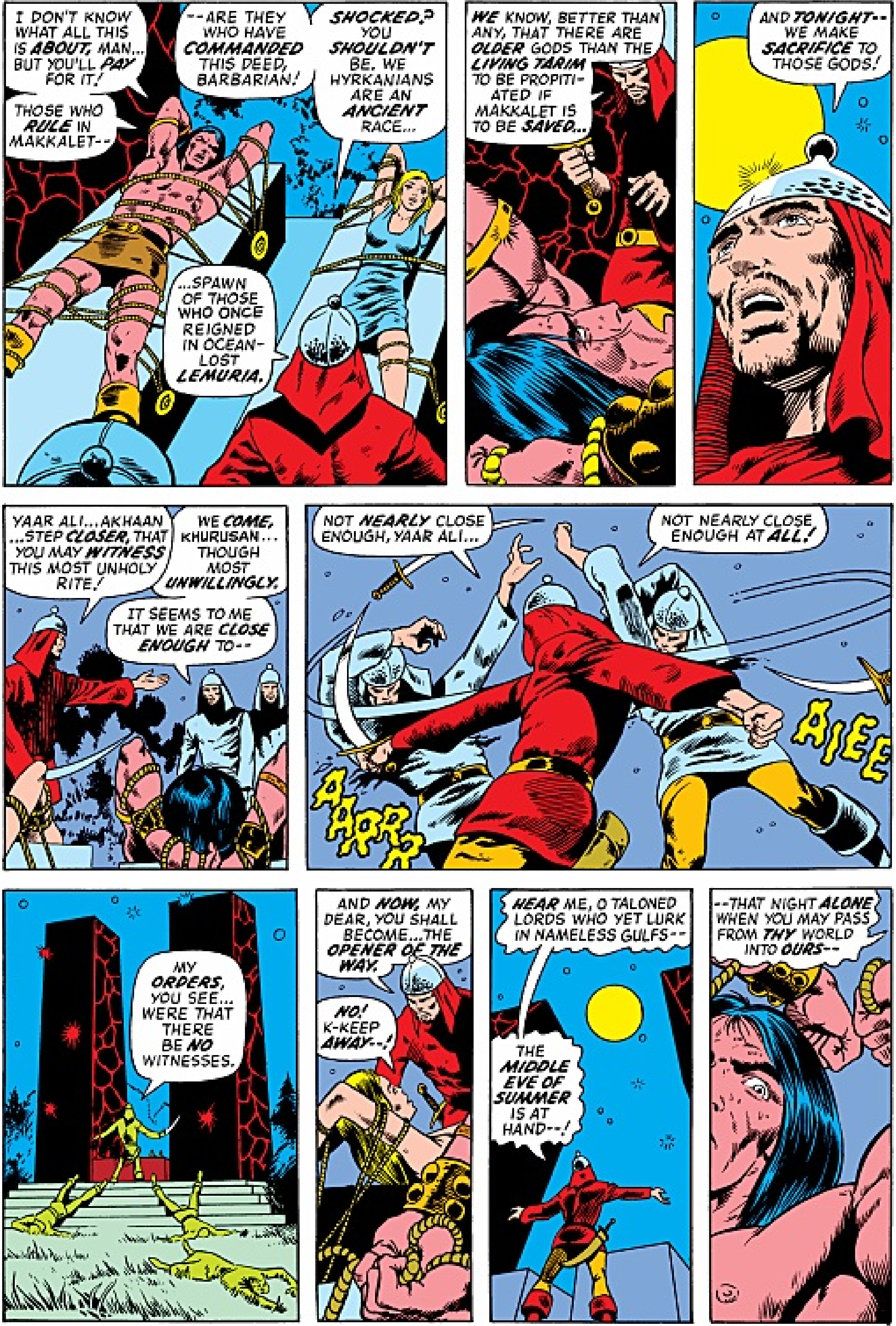

...PERHAPS NEARLY AS MANY AS THERE ARE GLEAMING SWORDS...
...IN THE TURANIAN WAR-CAMP WHICH COMPLETELY GIRDS THE EMBATTLED CITY.
MAKAALET IS SURROUNDED BY LAND AND SEA, SIRE.
IT CANNOT SURVIVE MORE THAN A FEW WEEKS.
EVEN THAT IS TOO LONG, FARIZAM.
FOR, SO LONG AS THE BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN WHO GAVE ME THIS SCAR STILL WALKS THE FACE OF THE EARTH...
EVEN FOR SO LONG IS YEZDIGERD THE MOST MISERABLE OF MEN.
SOON, THOUGH, A SHADOW SHALL FALL ACROSS THIS DOOMED LAND...
...THE SHADOW OF THE VULTURE!
THERE IS HALF A MILE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE WALLS OF MAKKALET AND THE SINISTER CAMPFIRES OF THE TURANIANS.
THOUGH CONAN IS AN ILL-EXPERIENCED HORSEMAN, HIS STEED ITSELF KNOWS TO KEEP ITS HOOFBEATS MUFFLED...
...SO THAT THEY PASS CLOSE ENOUGH BY YEZDIGERD'S OWN TENTS...
...TO HEAR A BAWDY JEST COME DRIFTING UP THRU THE CHILL NIGHT AIR.
THEN, A DARK GLADE LOOMS BEFORE THE QUARTET OF RIDERS...
...A GLADE WHICH LIES BETWEEN THE SECTIONS OF A THICK-WOODED FOREST WHICH ALONE MAY PROVIDE THEM PASSAGE THRU THE TURANIAN HOSTS.
EYES DARTING RIGHT, THEN LEFT, THE SOMBRE HORSEMEN ENTER THE GLADE...
NO BIRD SCREAMS OR TWITTERS... NO FROG IS HEARD TO CROAK...

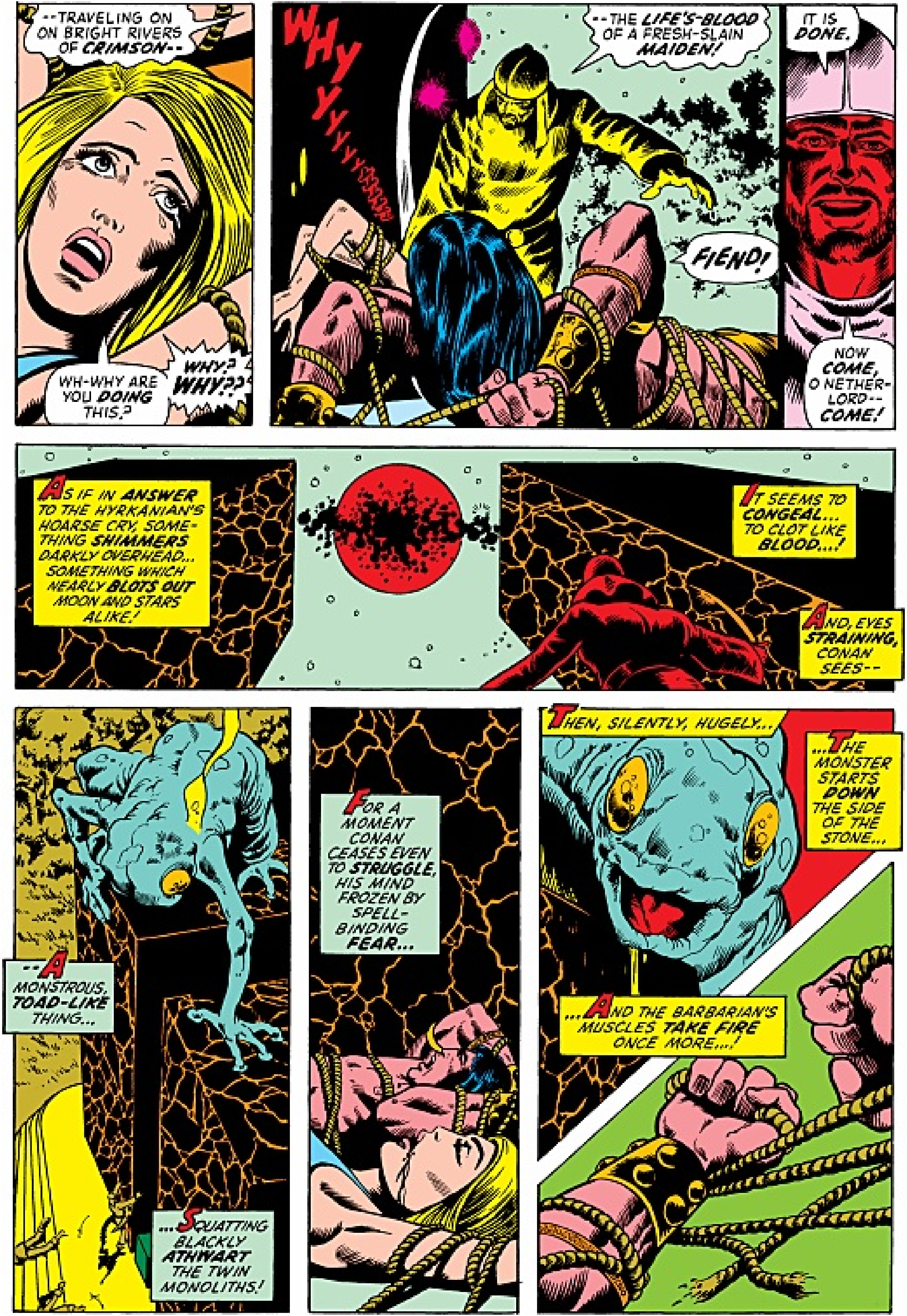

THEN SUDDENLY, GALLOPING FROM THE FOREST--
ABOMINATIONS OF ERLIK!
YONDER--TWO TURANIAN SCOUTS!
AND ARMED WITH--
--FLAMING ARROWS
CROM!
THE ADVANTAGE IS THEIRS!
MAYBE SO--
THEN, TO THE DEVIL WITH SUCH UNMANLY WEAPONS!
JUST GIVE ME A BROADSWORD-- AND A RUNNING START--
--AND I'LL FORGET THE BOW--

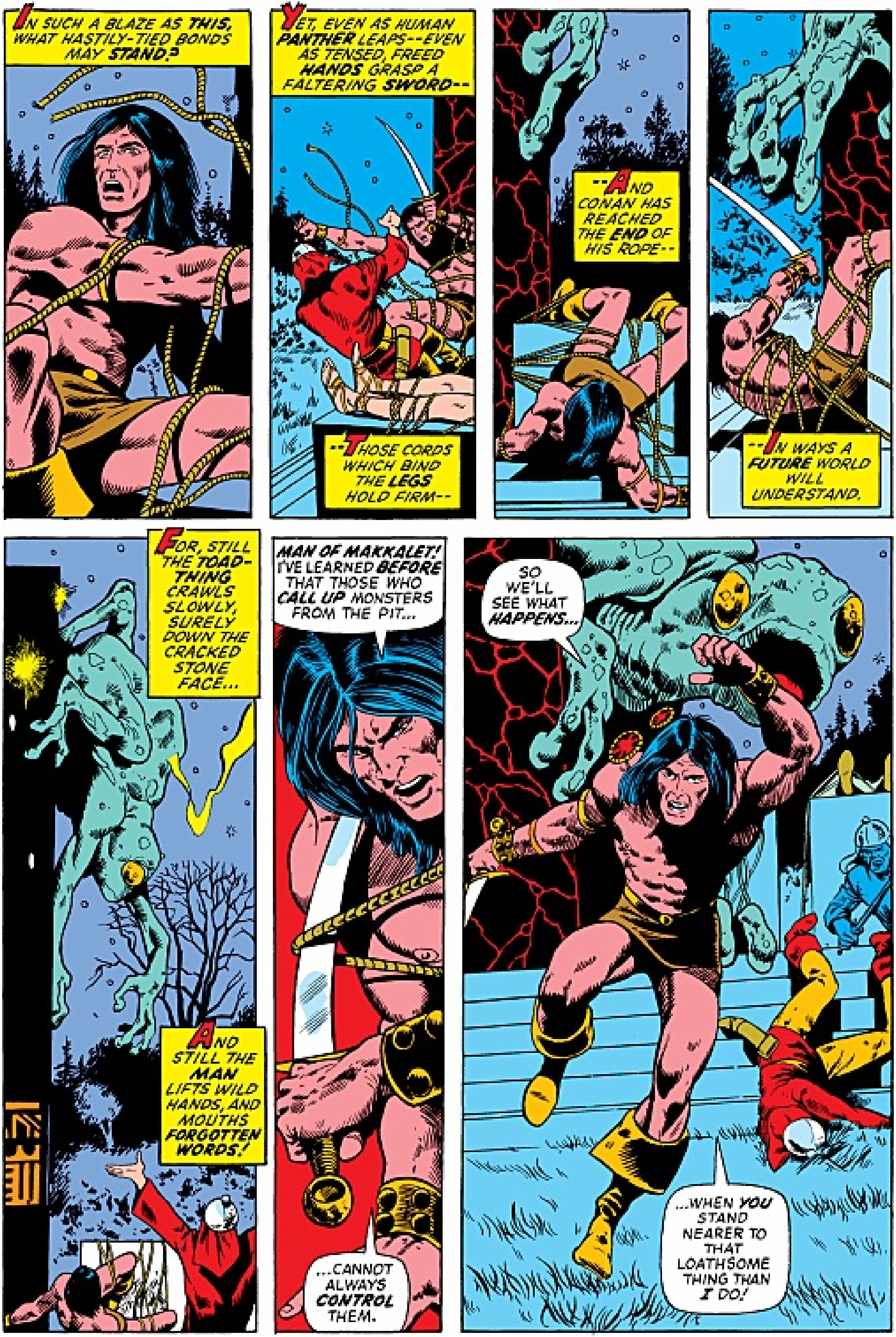

--AND STILL THE HAND!!
GUNGGH
ALL RIGHT, BRAVE WARRIORS OF THE EAST... YOU CAN COME CLOSER NOW.
HERE LIE TWO TURANIAN BOWMEN WHO WILL LOOSE NO MORE ARROWS.
OUR THANKS, BARBARIAN. NOW NOTHING IS LIKE TO BAR OUR WAY TO--
KHURUSAN... I KILLED THEM FOR YOU... NOW SHUT UP!
I KNEW THOSE TWO, WHEN I WAS A SOLDIER OF TURAN...
AND EITHER OF THEM WAS WORTH A REGIMENT OF YOU!
THE ROAD LIES OPEN NOW...
TWO WEEKS OF LONG, HARD RIDING FOLLOW...
THEN, ON THE FIFTEENTH NIGHT, A FIR-COVERED SLOPE RISES BOLDLY BEFORE THE GRIM TRAVELERS...
I DON'T SEE WHY WE TAKE THIS STEEP PATH...
...WHEN BETTER ROADS SEEMED TO LEAD AROUND THE HILL.
IT WAS THE QUEEN HERSELF WHO HAD US MAKE THIS SMALL DETOUR, CIMMERIAN...
THERE ARE... CERTAIN RITES TO PERFORM, IF VICTORY FOR MAKKALET IS TO BE ASSURED.
AND, THE SOLE PLACE ON THE GODS' GREEN EARTH TO PERFORM THEM...
...IS THERE!!

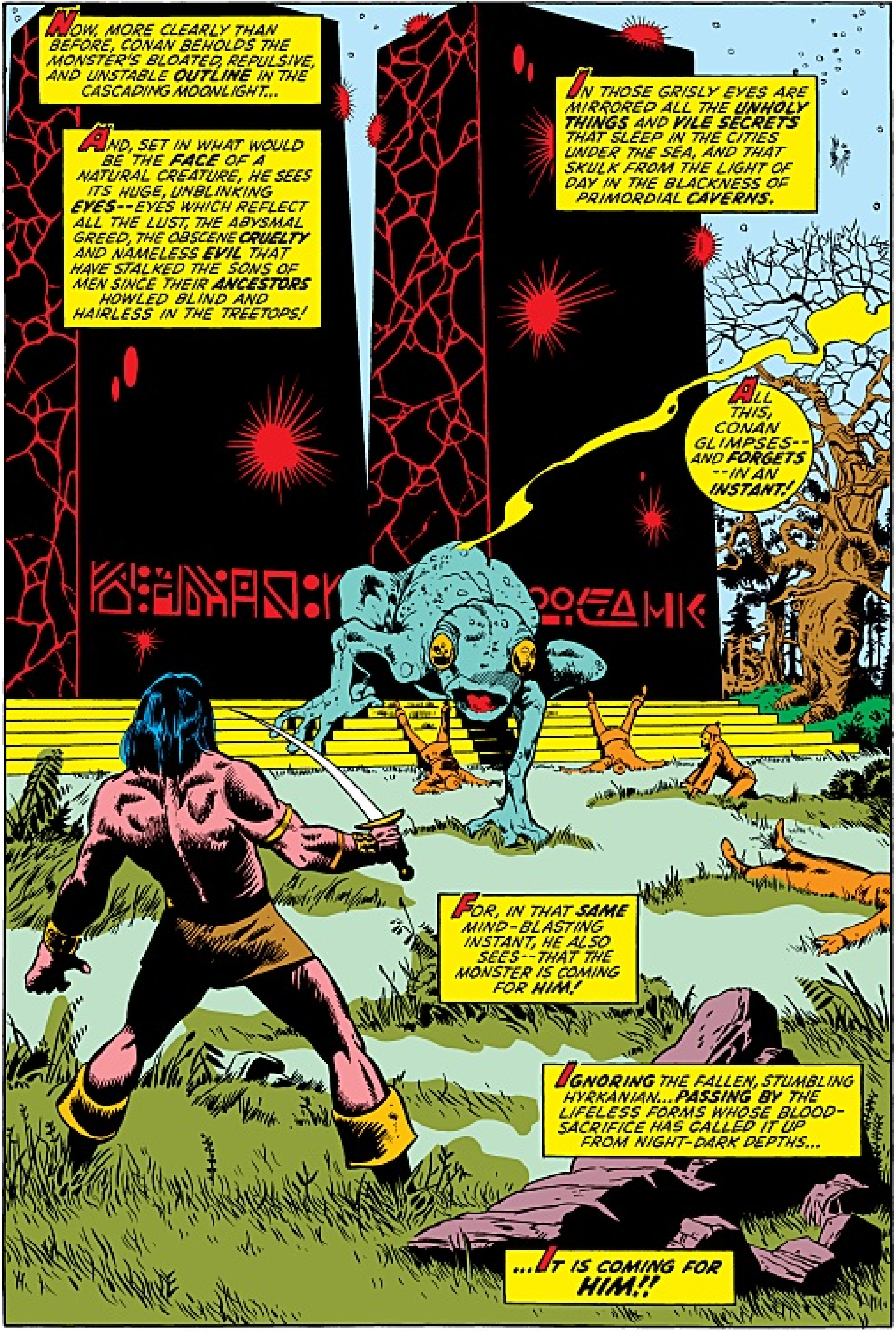

A WIDE GLADE SEEMS TO UNFOLD THEM, AND IN ITS CENTER...
THE BLACK MONOLITHS OF XUTHLTAN!
AND THERE'S JUSTIN, THE BLIND HERMIT--JUST LIKE ALWAYS!
BUT THIS YEAR, IT SEEMS--SOMETHING NEW HAS BEEN ADDED!
SOMETHING MORE ATTRACTIVE THAN AN EYE-DOG, TOO!
NO, GREYBEARD! BESTIR YOURSELF!
HELP US READY THE SACRIFICIAL BRAZIERS!
THIS VERY NIGHT, WHEN THE MOON IS RIGHT, WE'LL MAKE OUR PRAYERS TO THE GOD WITH NO NAME!
WHAT? FOOL! DO YOU KNOW WHAT NIGHT THIS IS--WHAT NIGHT, OF ALL NIGHTS?
I KNOW WELL ENOUGH, HERMIT.
NOW, STILL THAT INSOLENT TONGUE OF YOURS...
OR WOULD YOU JUST AS SOON BE SILENT...
...AS WELL AS BLIND?
IDLY CURIOUS, CONAN GUIDES HIS MOUNT CLOSER TO THE REARING STONES...
THE HALF-DEFACED CARVINGS THEREON LOOK SOMEHOW OMINOUSLY FAMILIAR...
BUT, HE CANNOT BE SURE....
SO HE TURNS AWAY, IN TIME TO HEAR...
YOU KNOW WHAT IS WRITTEN...
"They say foul things of olden times still lurk
In dark forgotten corners of the world...
"...And gates still gape, to loose...on certain nights...
"...Shapes pent in Hell!"
FATHER... PLEASE...
HUSH, GIRL. I MERELY SAID... WHAT I HAD TO SAY!
CERTAIN NIGHTS? WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY THAT, OLD MAN?
YOUR ACCENTS TELL ME YOU'RE NOT OF HYRKANIAN BIRTH, BOY.
THEN RIDE, I PRAY THEE--RIDE FAR AWAY AND FAST!
I'LL SAY NO MORE.

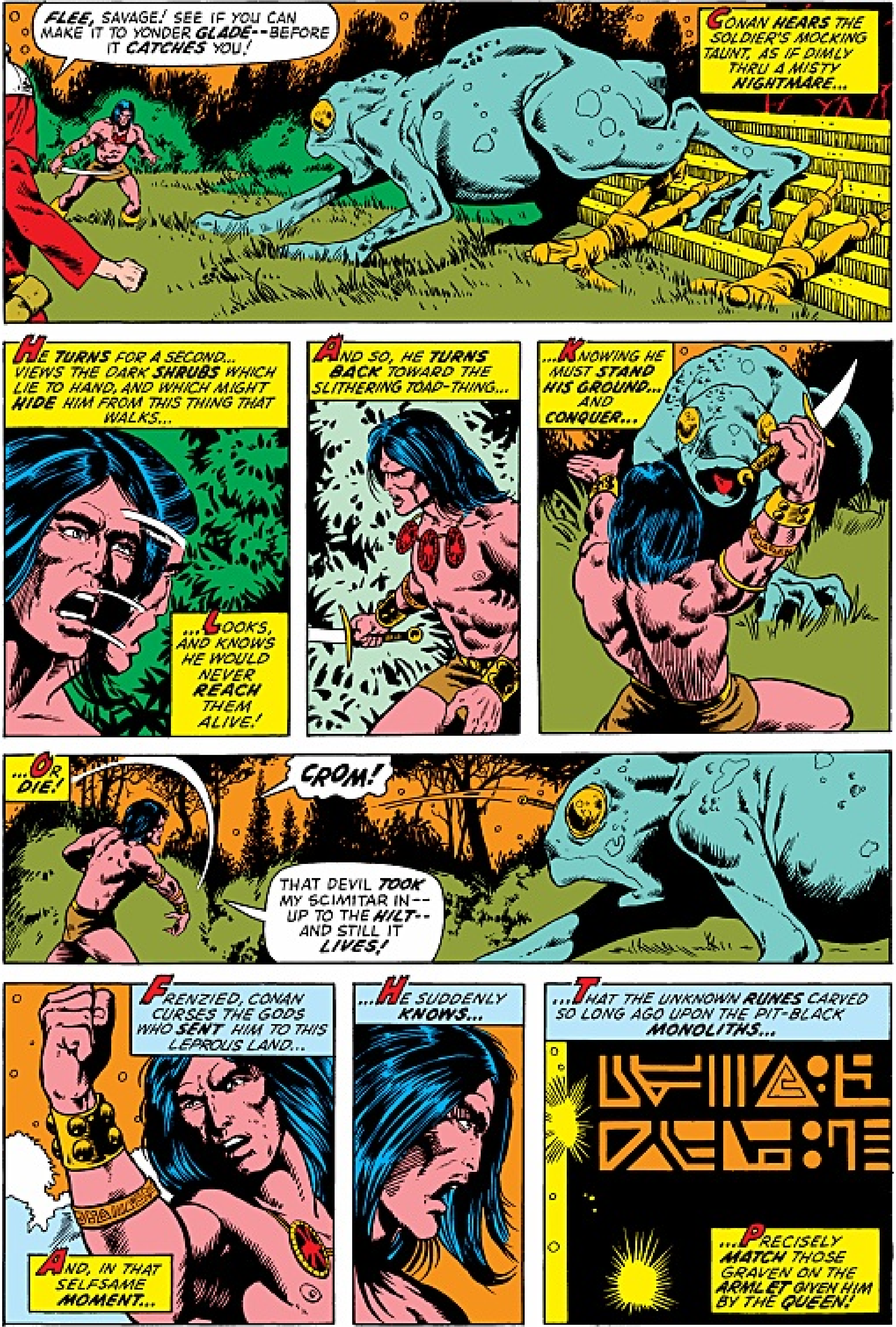

WHAT DO YOU SAY, GIRL?
WHAT I TELL HER TO!
COME, DAUGHTER --TO THE VILLAGE YONDER--!
THEY WHO DWELL THERE WILL STOP YOU SOON ENOUGH FROM WAKING--
KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF ME, YOU--
FATHER...!
FATHER...!
YAAR ALI... NOW!
UNNH
THE MOON RISES HIGHER STILL IN THE STAR-FLECKED HEAVENS...
AND, AT LENGTH, CIMMERIAN GLARES ONCE MORE INTO BURNING HYRKANIAN EYES...
WELL, LOUT... YOU LIKED THOSE TWO TURANIAN SCUM SO MUCH...
YOU'LL DOUBTLESS BE GLAD TO JOIN THEM SOON... IN DEATH.

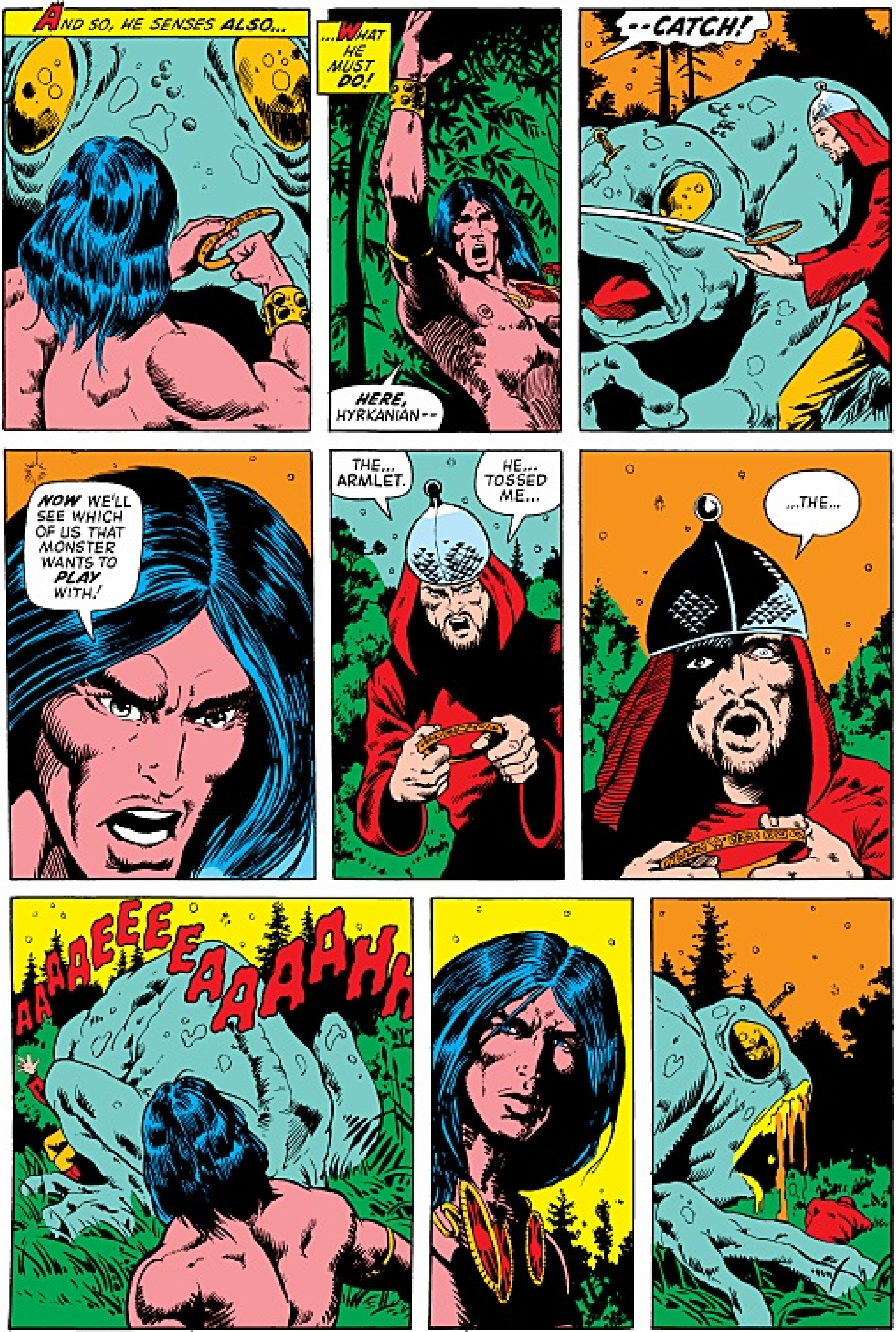

I DON'T KNOW WHAT ALL THIS IS ABOUT, MAN... BUT YOU'LL PAY FOR IT!
THOSE WHO RULE IN MAKKALET--
--ARE THEY WHO HAVE COMMANDED THIS DEED, BARBARIAN!
SHOCKED? YOU SHOULDN'T BE. WE HYRKANIANS ARE AN ANCIENT RACE...
...SPAWN OF THOSE WHO ONCE REIGNED IN OCEAN-LOST LEMURIA.
WE KNOW, BETTER THAN ANY, THAT THERE ARE OLDER GODS THAN THE LIVING TARIM TO BE PROPITIATED IF MAKKALET IS TO BE SAVED...
AND TONIGHT-- WE MAKE SACRIFICE TO THOSE GODS!
YAAR ALI... AKHAAN ...STEP CLOSER, THAT YOU MAY WITNESS THIS MOST UNHOLY RITE!
WE COME, KHURUSAN... THOUGH MOST UNWILLINGLY.
IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE ARE CLOSE ENOUGH TO--
NOT NEARLY CLOSE ENOUGH, YAAR ALI...
NOT NEARLY CLOSE ENOUGH AT ALL!
AIEE
AARRR
MY ORDERS, YOU SEE... WERE THAT THERE BE NO WITNESSES.
AND NOW, MY DEAR, YOU SHALL BECOME...THE OPENER OF THE WAY.
NO! K-KEEP AWAY--!
HEAR ME, O TALONED LORDS WHO YET LURK IN NAMELESS GULFS--
THE MIDDLE EVE OF SUMMER IS AT HAND--!
--THAT NIGHT ALONE WHEN YOU MAY PASS FROM THY WORLD INTO OURS--

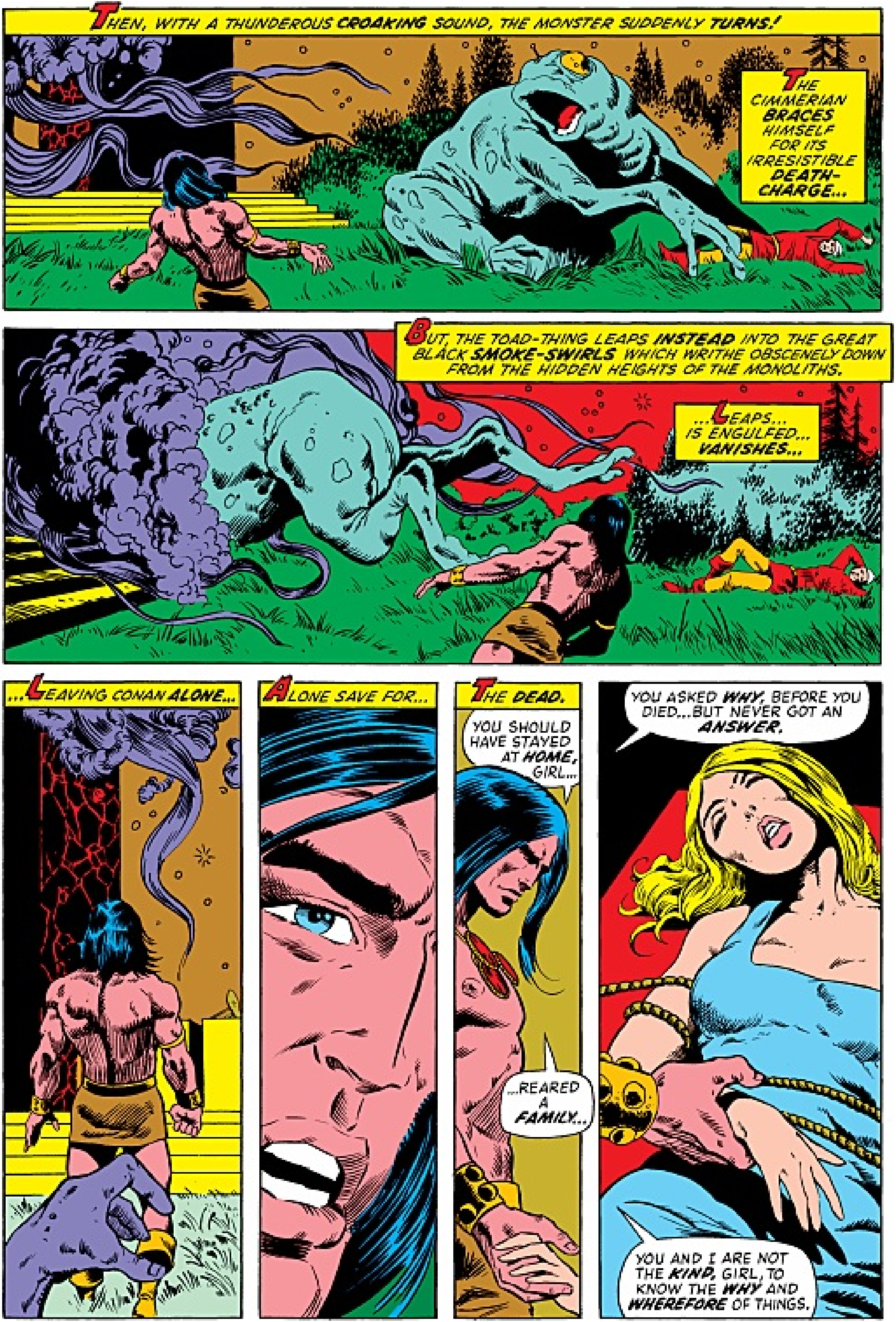

--TRAVELING ON ON BRIGHT RIVERS OF CRIMSON--
WH-WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
WHY? WHY??
WHYYYYYYYYYYYY
--THE LIFE'S-BLOOD OF A FRESH-SLAIN MAIDEN!
FIEND!
IT IS DONE.
NOW COME, O NETHER-LORD--COME!
AS IF IN ANSWER TO THE HYRKANIAN'S HOARSE CRY, SOMETHING SHIMMERS DARKLY OVERHEAD... SOMETHING WHICH NEARLY BLOTS OUT MOON AND STARS ALIKE!
IT SEEMS TO CONGEAL... TO CLOT LIKE BLOOD...!
AND, EYES STRAINING, CONAN SEES--
--A MONSTROUS, TOAD-LIKE THING...
...SQUATTING BLACKLY ATHWART THE TWIN MONOLITHS!
FOR A MOMENT CONAN CEASES EVEN TO STRUGGLE, HIS MIND FROZEN BY SPELL-BINDING FEAR...
THEN, SILENTLY, HUGELY...
...THE MONSTER STARTS DOWN THE SIDE OF THE STONE...
...AND THE BARBARIAN'S MUSCLES TAKE FIRE ONCE MORE...!

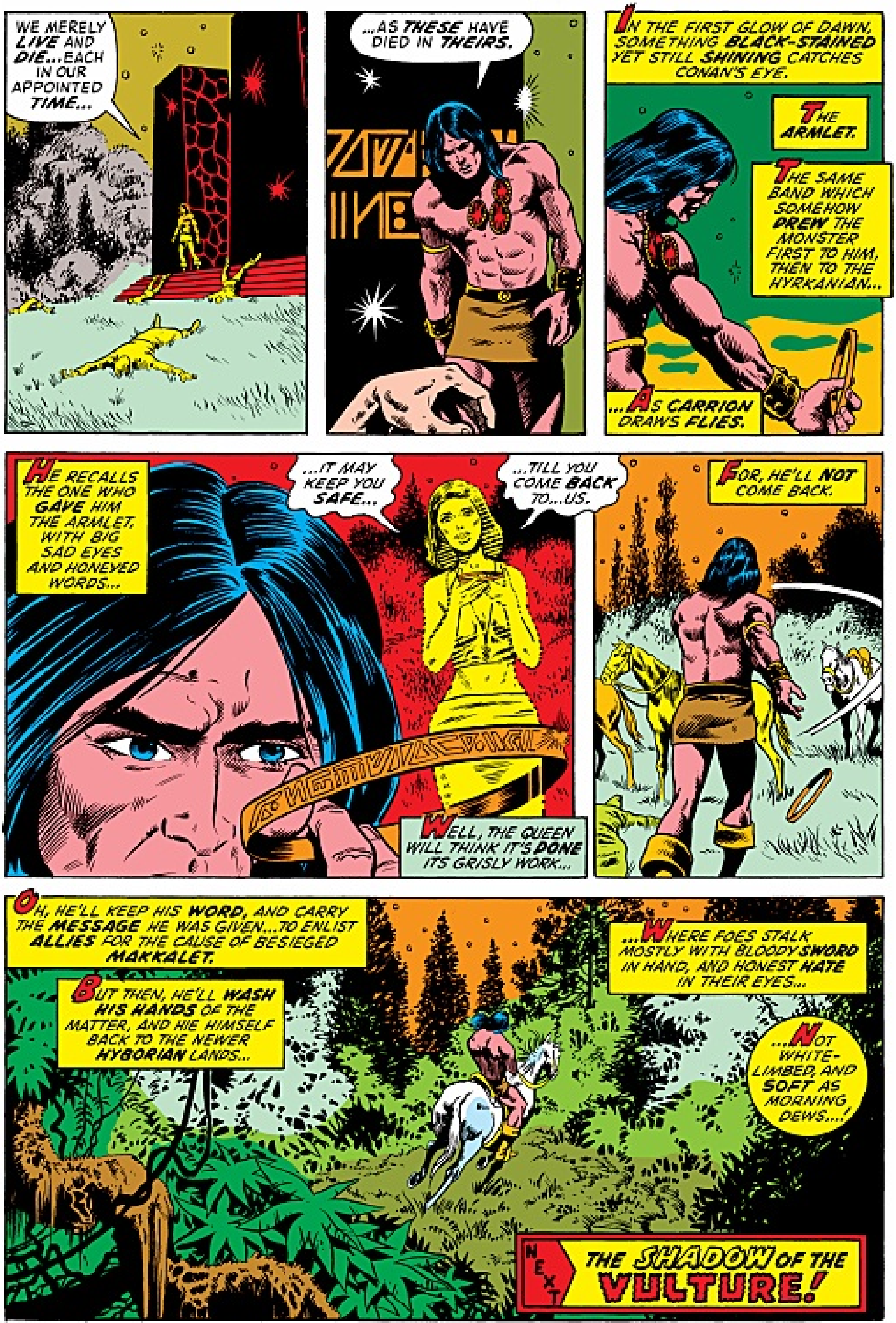

IN SUCH A BLAZE AS THIS, WHAT HASTILY-TIED BONDS MAY STAND?
YET, EVEN AS HUMAN PANTHER LEAPS--EVEN AS TENSED, FREED HANDS GRASP A FALTERING SWORD--
--THOSE CORDS WHICH BIND THE LEGS HOLD FIRM--
--AND CONAN HAS REACHED THE END OF HIS ROPE--
--IN WAYS A FUTURE WORLD WILL UNDERSTAND.
FOR, STILL THE TOAD-THING CRAWLS SLOWLY, SURELY DOWN THE CRACKED STONE FACE...
AND STILL THE MAN LIFTS WILD HANDS, AND MOUTHS FORGOTTEN WORDS!
MAN OF MAKKALET! I'VE LEARNED BEFORE THAT THOSE WHO CALL UP MONSTERS FROM THE PIT...
...CANNOT ALWAYS CONTROL THEM.
SO WE'LL SEE WHAT HAPPENS...
...WHEN YOU STAND NEARER TO THAT LOATHSOME THING THAN I DO!

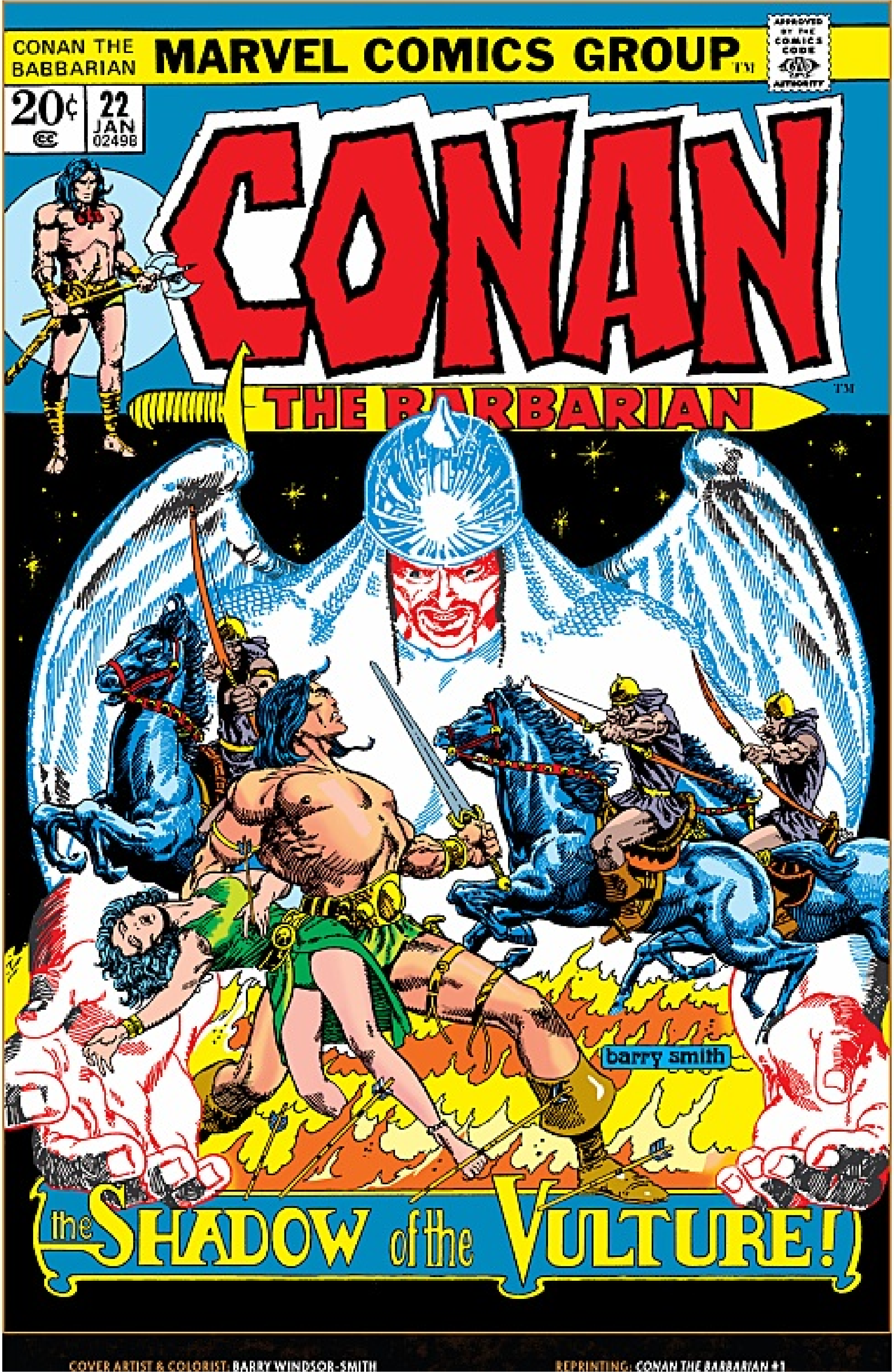

NOW, MORE CLEARLY THAN BEFORE, CONAN BEHOLDS THE MONSTER'S BLOATED, REPULSIVE, AND UNSTABLE OUTLINE IN THE CASCADING MOONLIGHT...
AND, SET IN WHAT WOULD BE THE FACE OF A NATURAL CREATURE, HE SEES ITS HUGE, UNBLINKING EYES--EYES WHICH REFLECT ALL THE LUST, THE ABYSMAL GREED, THE OBSCENE CRUELTY AND NAMELESS EVIL THAT HAVE STALKED THE SONS OF MEN SINCE THEIR ANCESTORS HOWLED BLIND AND HAIRLESS IN THE TREETOPS!
IN THOSE GRISLY EYES ARE MIRRORED ALL THE UNHOLY THINGS AND VILE SECRETS THAT SLEEP IN THE CITIES UNDER THE SEA, AND THAT SKULK FROM THE LIGHT OF DAY IN THE BLACKNESS OF PRIMORDIAL CAVERNS.
ALL THIS, CONAN GLIMPSES--AND FORGETS--IN AN INSTANT!
FOR, IN THAT SAME MIND-BLASTING INSTANT, HE ALSO SEES--THAT THE MONSTER IS COMING FOR HIM!
IGNORING THE FALLEN, STUMBLING HYRKANIAN...PASSING BY THE LIFELESS FORMS WHOSE BLOOD-SACRIFICE HAS CALLED IT UP FROM NIGHT-DARK DEPTHS...
...IT IS COMING FOR HIM!!


FLEE, SAVAGE! SEE IF YOU CAN MAKE IT TO YONDER GLADE--BEFORE IT CATCHES YOU!
CONAN HEARS THE SOLDIER'S MOCKING TAUNT, AS IF DIMLY THRU A MISTY NIGHTMARE...
HE TURNS FOR A SECOND... VIEWS THE DARK SHRUBS WHICH LIE TO HAND, AND WHICH MIGHT HIDE HIM FROM THIS THING THAT WALKS...
...LOOKS, AND KNOWS HE WOULD NEVER REACH THEM ALIVE!
AND SO, HE TURNS BACK TOWARD THE SLITHERING TOAD-THING...
...KNOWING HE MUST STAND HIS GROUND... AND CONQUER...
...OR DIE!
CROM!
THAT DEVIL TOOK MY SCIMITAR IN-- UP TO THE HILT-- AND STILL IT LIVES!
FRENZIED, CONAN CURSES THE GODS WHO SENT HIM TO THIS LEPROUS LAND...
AND, IN THAT SELFSAME MOMENT...
...HE SUDDENLY KNOWS...
...THAT THE UNKNOWN RUNES CARVED SO LONG AGO UPON THE PIT-BLACK MONOLITHS...
...PRECISELY MATCH THOSE GRAVEN ON THE ARMLET GIVEN HIM BY THE QUEEN!


AND SO, HE SENSES ALSO...
...WHAT HE MUST DO!
HERE, HYRKANIAN--
--CATCH!
NOW WE'LL SEE WHICH OF US THAT MONSTER WANTS TO PLAY WITH!
THE... ARMLET.
HE... TOSSED ME...
...THE...
AAAAEEEEAAAAHH


THEN, WITH A THUNDEROUS CROAKING SOUND, THE MONSTER SUDDENLY TURNS!
THE CIMMERIAN BRACES HIMSELF FOR ITS IRRESISTIBLE DEATH-CHARGE...
BUT, THE TOAD-THING LEAPS INSTEAD INTO THE GREAT BLACK SMOKE-SWIRLS WHICH WRITHE OBSCENELY DOWN FROM THE HIDDEN HEIGHTS OF THE MONOLITHS.
...LEAPS... IS ENGULFED... VANISHES...
...LEAVING CONAN ALONE...
ALONE SAVE FOR...
THE DEAD.
YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED AT HOME, GIRL...
...REARED A FAMILY...
YOU ASKED WHY, BEFORE YOU DIED...BUT NEVER GOT AN ANSWER.
YOU AND I ARE NOT THE KIND, GIRL, TO KNOW THE WHY AND WHEREFORE OF THINGS.


WE MERELY LIVE AND DIE...EACH IN OUR APPOINTED TIME...
...AS THESE HAVE DIED IN THEIRS.
IN THE FIRST GLOW OF DAWN, SOMETHING BLACK-STAINED YET STILL SHINING CATCHES CONAN'S EYE.
THE ARMLET.
THE SAME BAND WHICH SOMEHOW DREW THE MONSTER FIRST TO HIM, THEN TO THE HYRKANIAN...
...AS CARRION DRAWS FLIES.
HE RECALLS THE ONE WHO GAVE HIM THE ARMLET, WITH BIG SAD EYES AND HONEYED WORDS...
...IT MAY KEEP YOU SAFE...
...TILL YOU COME BACK TO...US.
WELL, THE QUEEN WILL THINK IT'S DONE ITS GRISLY WORK...
FOR, HE'LL NOT COME BACK.
OH, HE'LL KEEP HIS WORD, AND CARRY THE MESSAGE HE WAS GIVEN...TO ENLIST ALLIES FOR THE CAUSE OF BESIEGED MAKKALET.
BUT THEN, HE'LL WASH HIS HANDS OF THE MATTER, AND HIE HIMSELF BACK TO THE NEWER HYBORIAN LANDS...
...WHERE FOES STALK MOSTLY WITH BLOODY SWORD IN HAND, AND HONEST HATE IN THEIR EYES...
...NOT WHITE-LIMBED, AND SOFT AS MORNING DEWS...!
NEXT
THE SHADOW OF THE VULTURE!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CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
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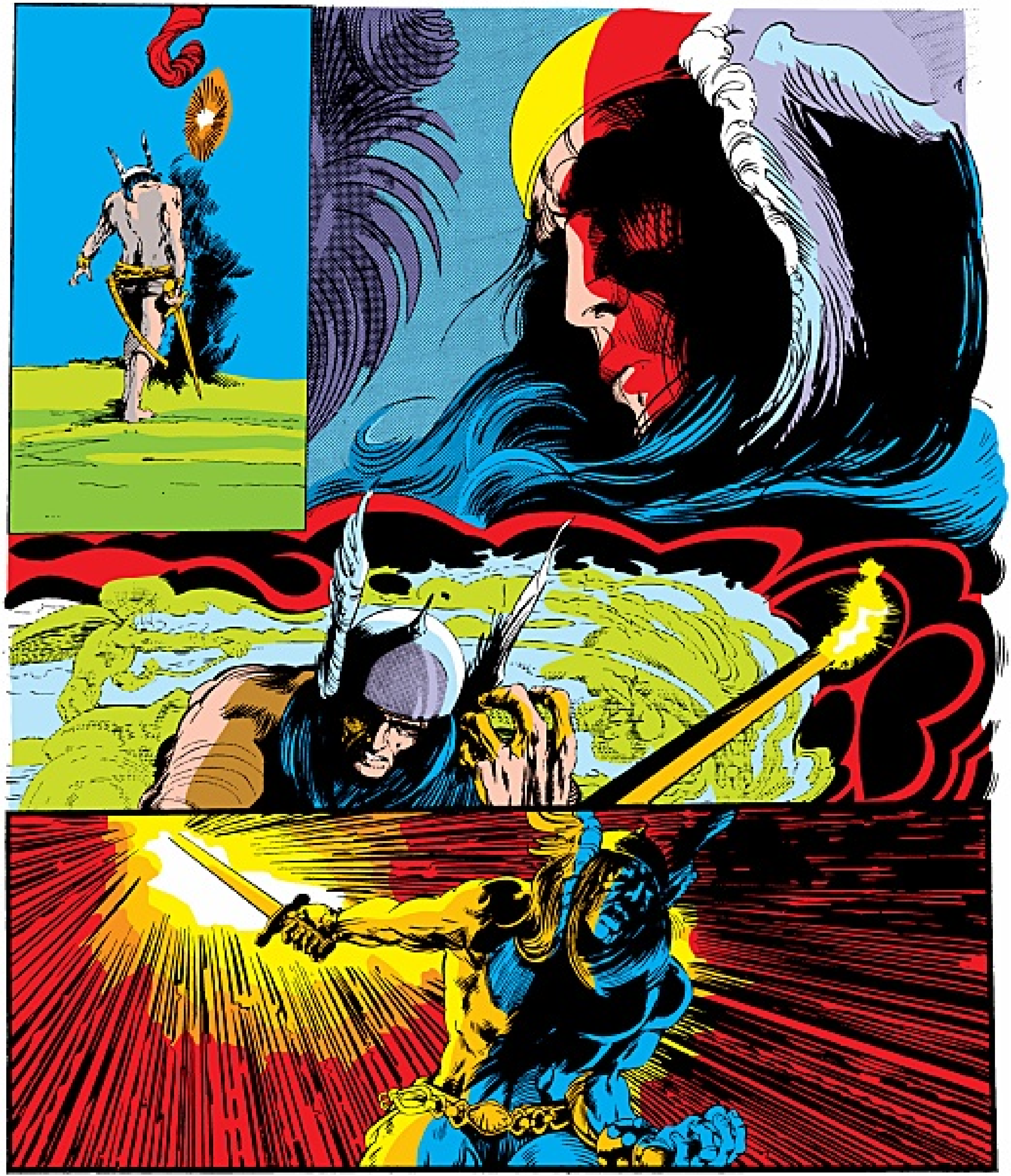
barry smith
the SHADOW of the VULTURE!

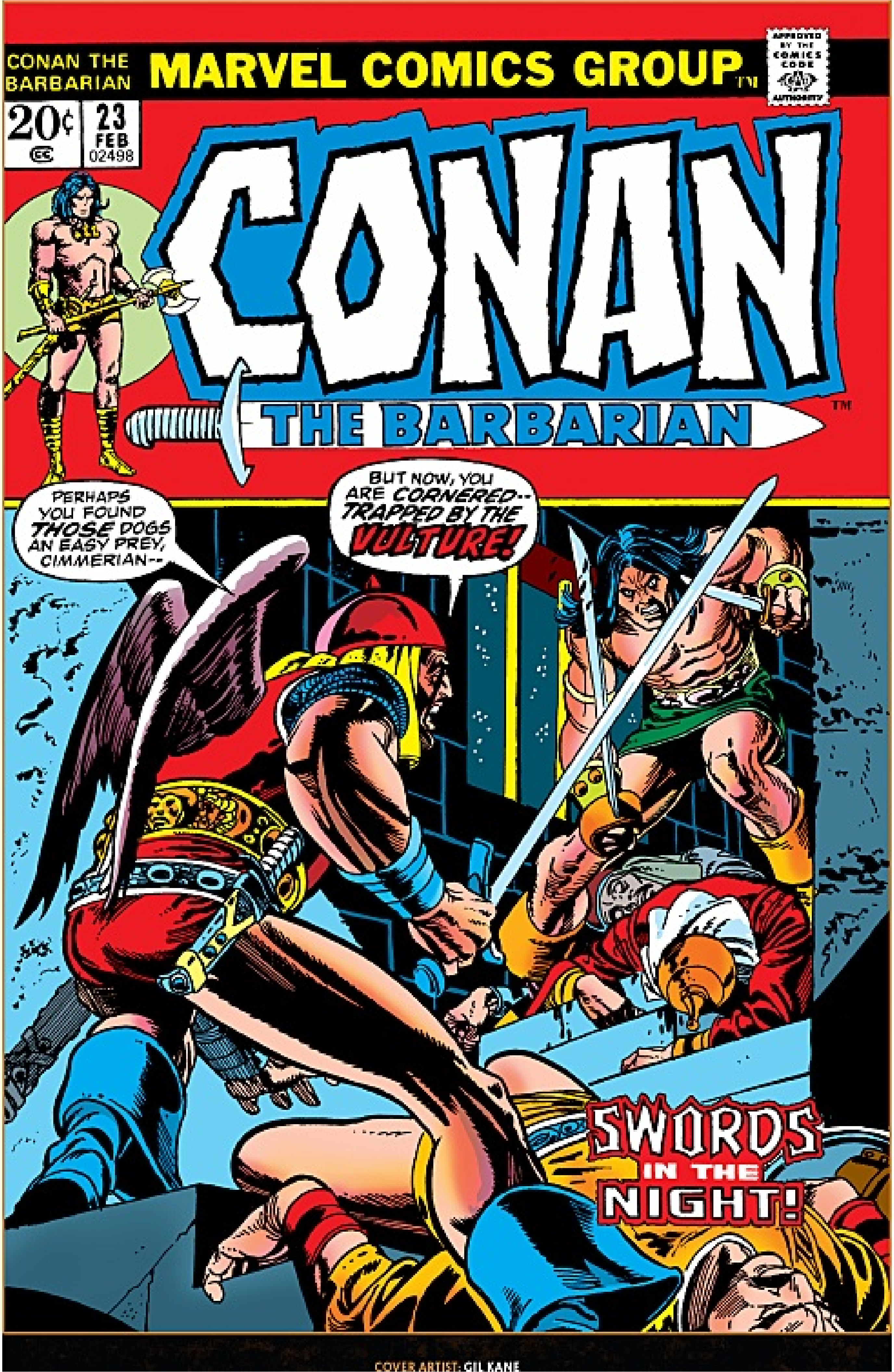
COVER ARTIST & COLORIST: BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

REPRINTING: *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* #1

SPECIAL
HYBORIAN PAGE
PIN-UP!

(SEE OUR LETTERS PAGE FOR THE STORY BEHIND THIS ONCE-IN-A LIFETIME WONDER--WHICH COMES DIRECT FROM ***BARRY (THE BARBARIAN) SMITH*** TO CONAN-BOOSTERS THE WORLD OVER!




CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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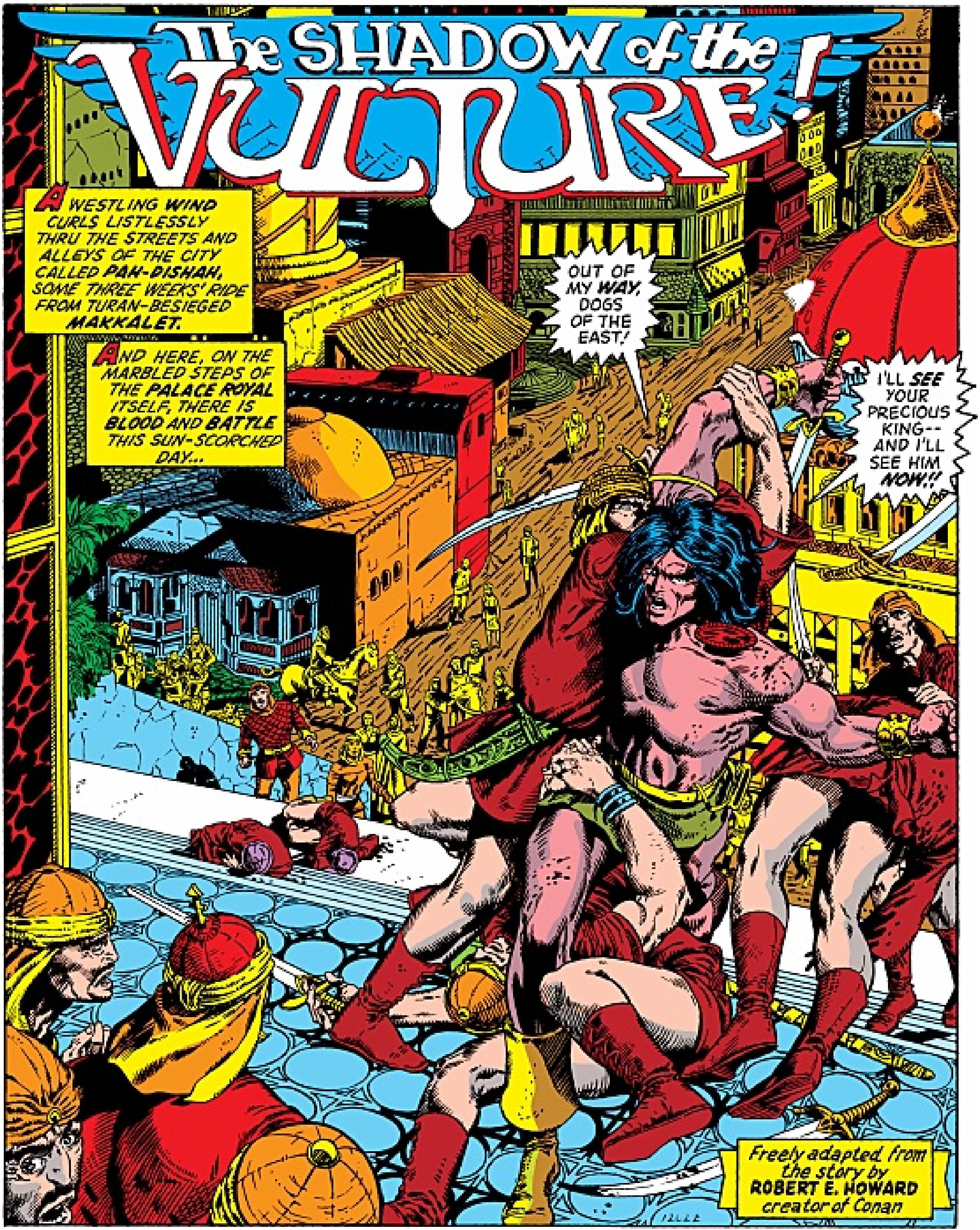
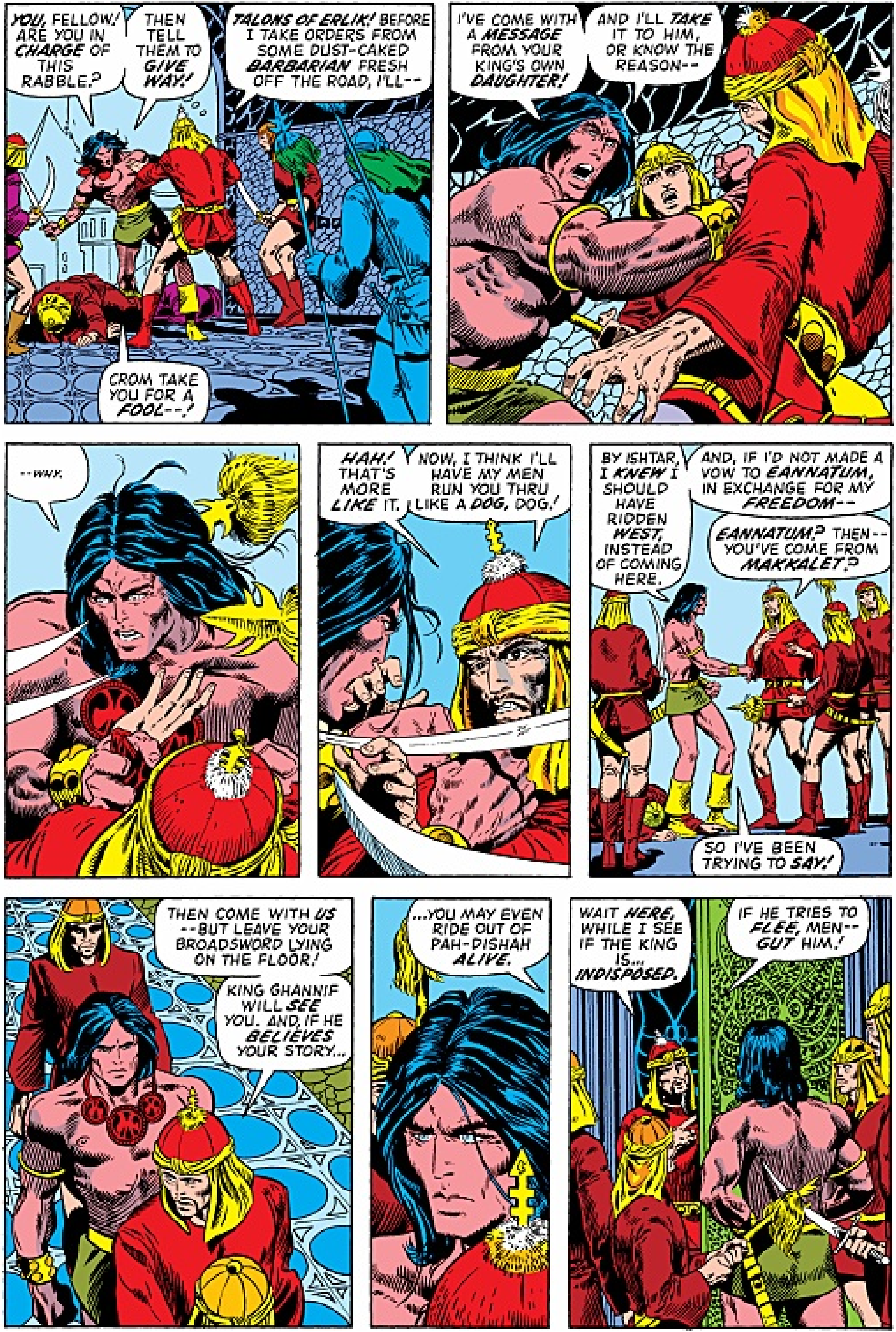
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
PERHAPS YOU FOUND THOSE DOGS AN EASY PREY, CIMMERIAN--
BUT NOW, YOU ARE CORNERED-- TRAPPED BY THE VULTURE!
SWORDS IN THE NIGHT!

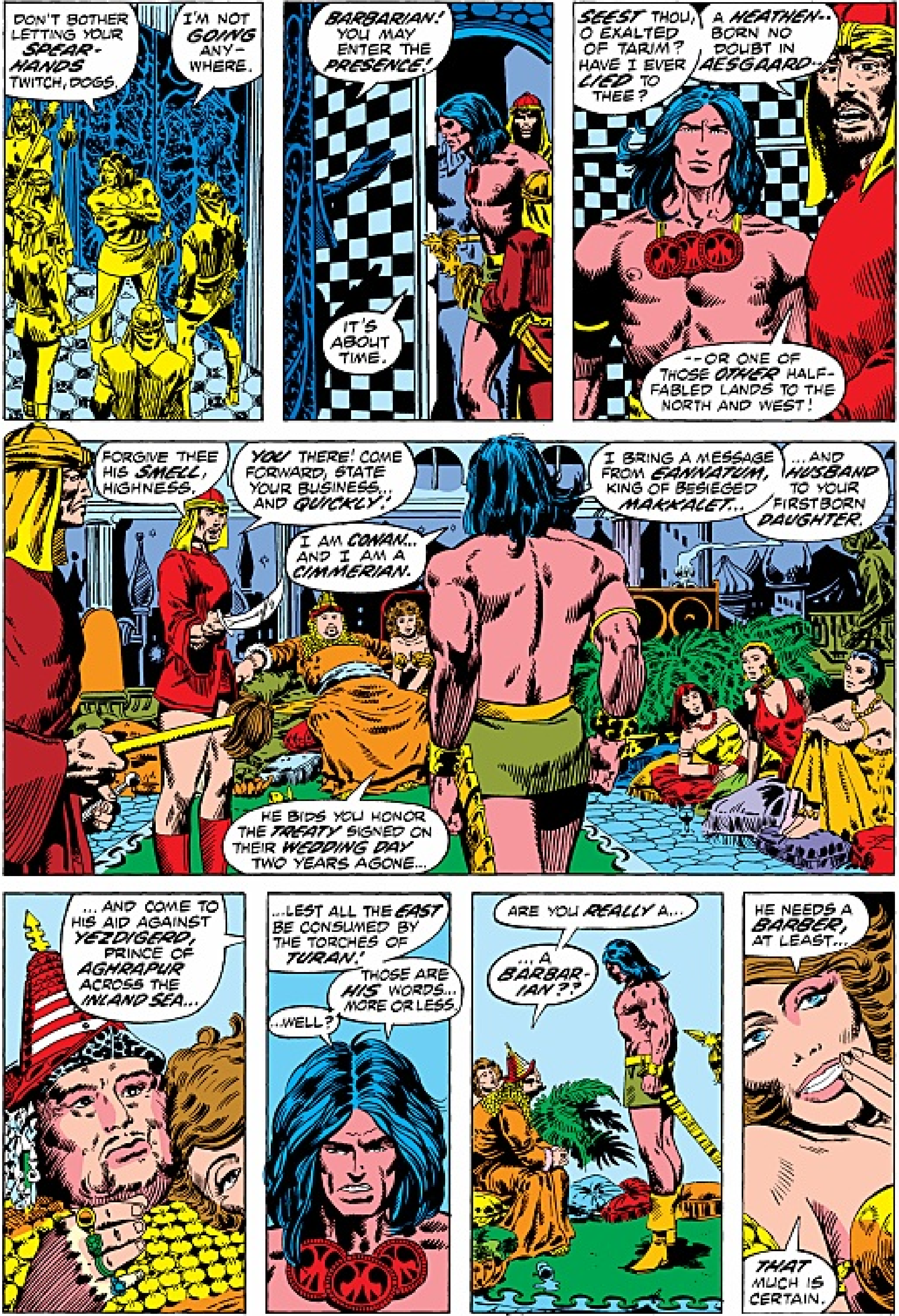
COVER ARTIST: GIL KANE

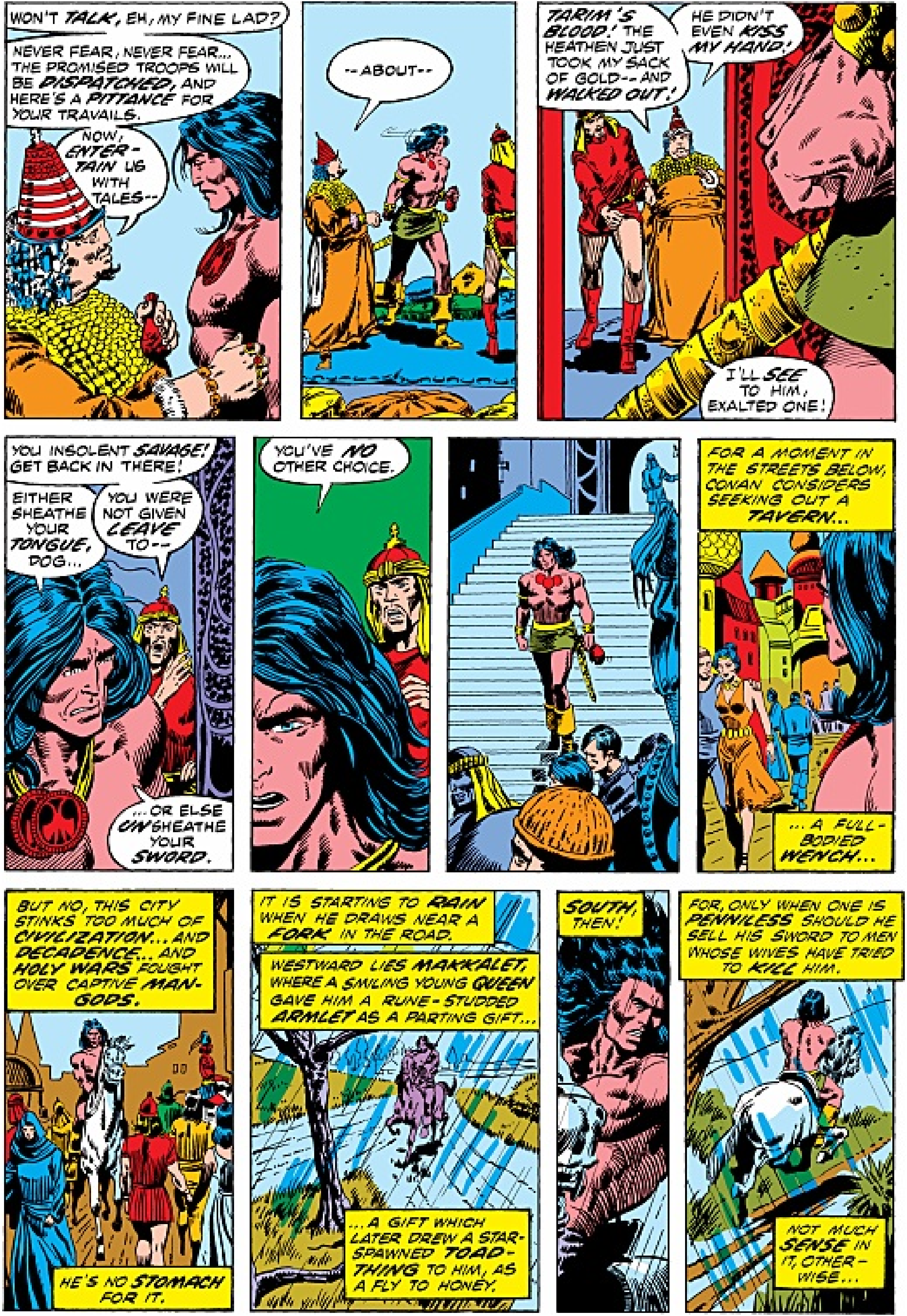
Stan Lee PRESENTS: **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**™

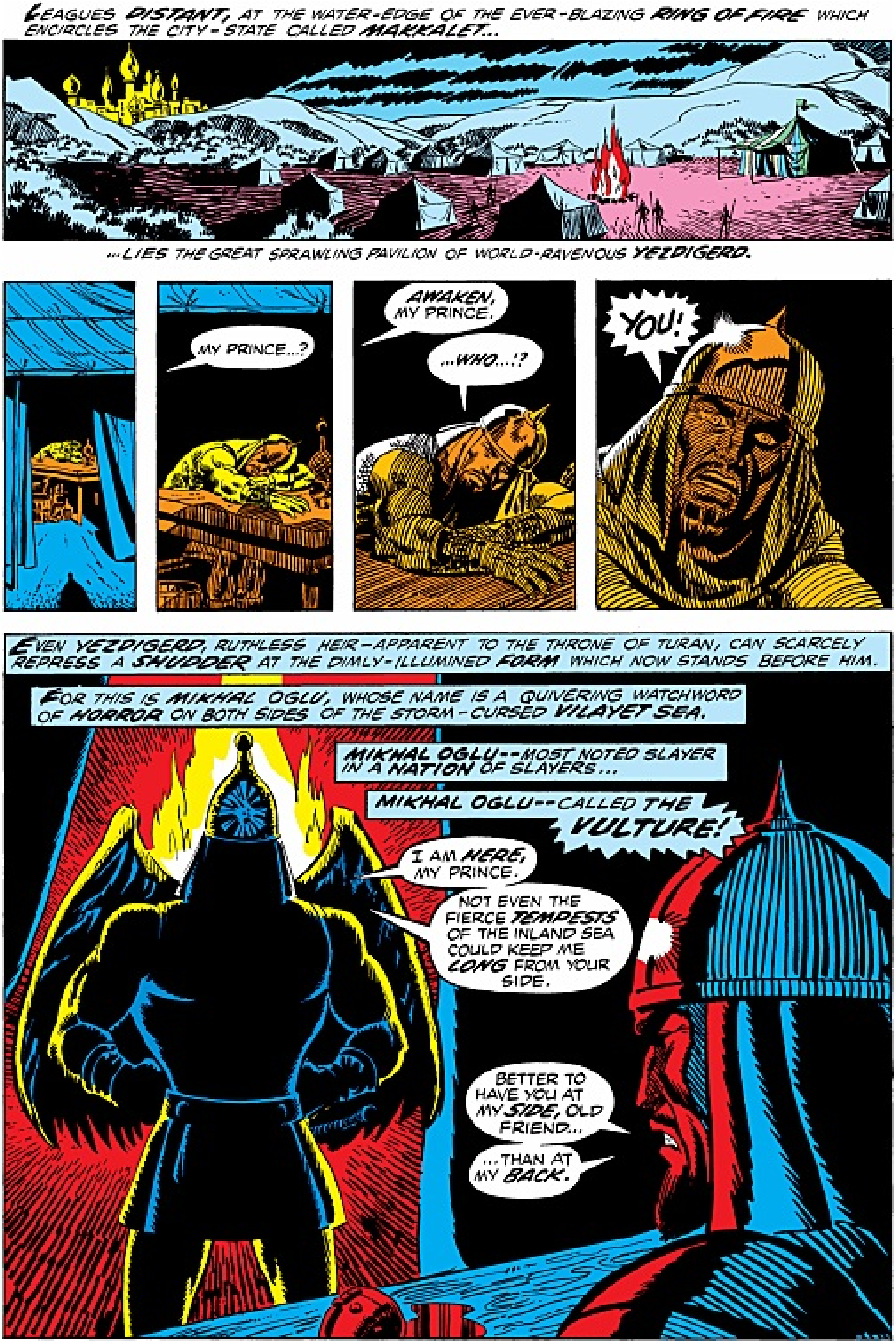
ROY THOMAS writer/editor and BARRY SMITH artist ★ BUSCEMA, ADKINS, & STONE inkers

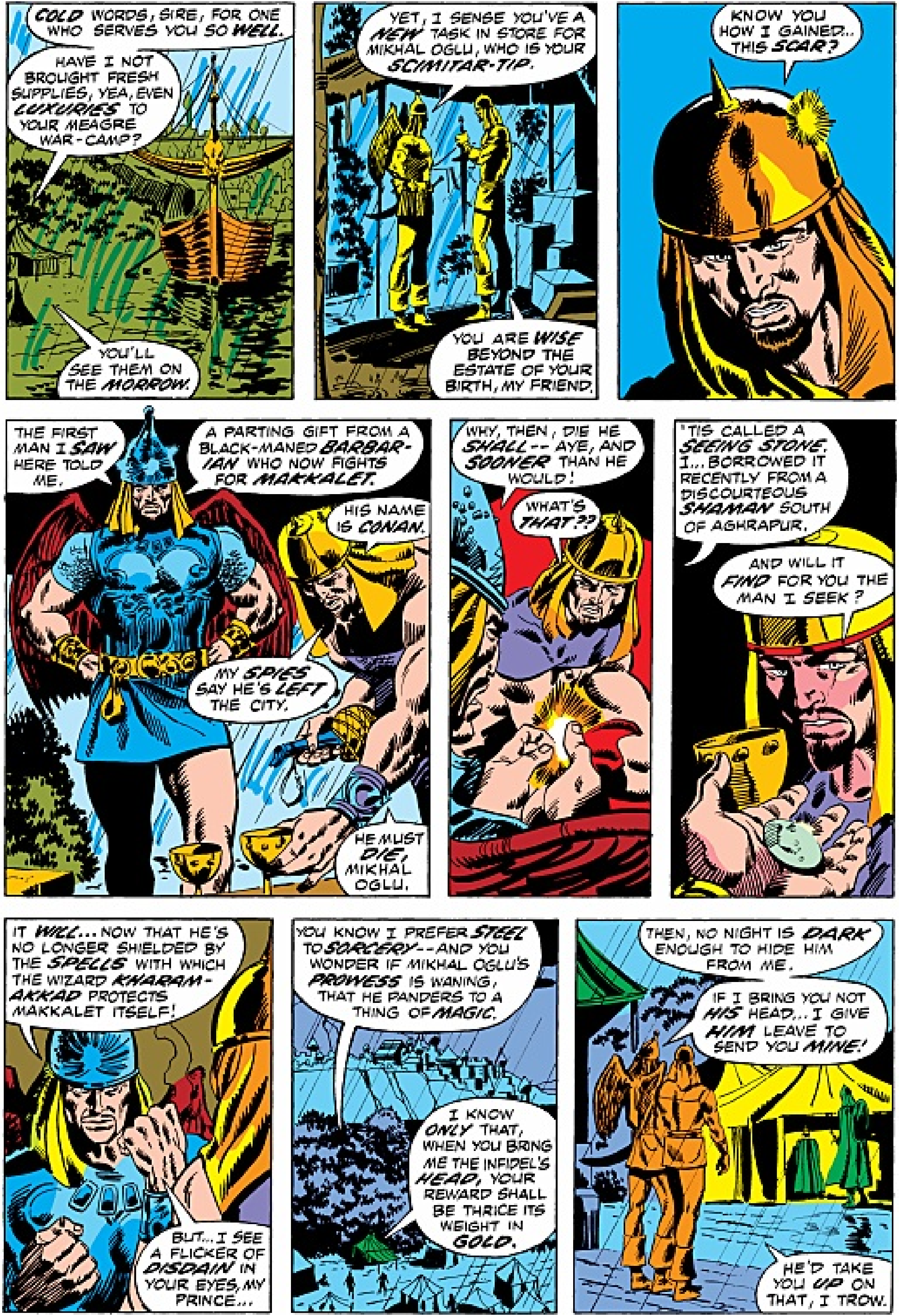

The SHADOW of the VULTURE!
A WESTLING WIND CURLS LISTLESSLY THRU THE STREETS AND ALLEYS OF THE CITY CALLED PAH-DISHAH, SOME THREE WEEKS' RIDE FROM TURAN-BESIEGED MAKKALET.
AND HERE, ON THE MARBLED STEPS OF THE PALACE ROYAL ITSELF, THERE IS BLOOD AND BATTLE THIS SUN-SCORCHED DAY...
OUT OF MY WAY, DOGS OF THE EAST!
I'LL SEE YOUR PRECIOUS KING-- AND I'LL SEE HIM NOW!!
Freely adapted from the story by ROBERT E. HOWARD creator of Conan

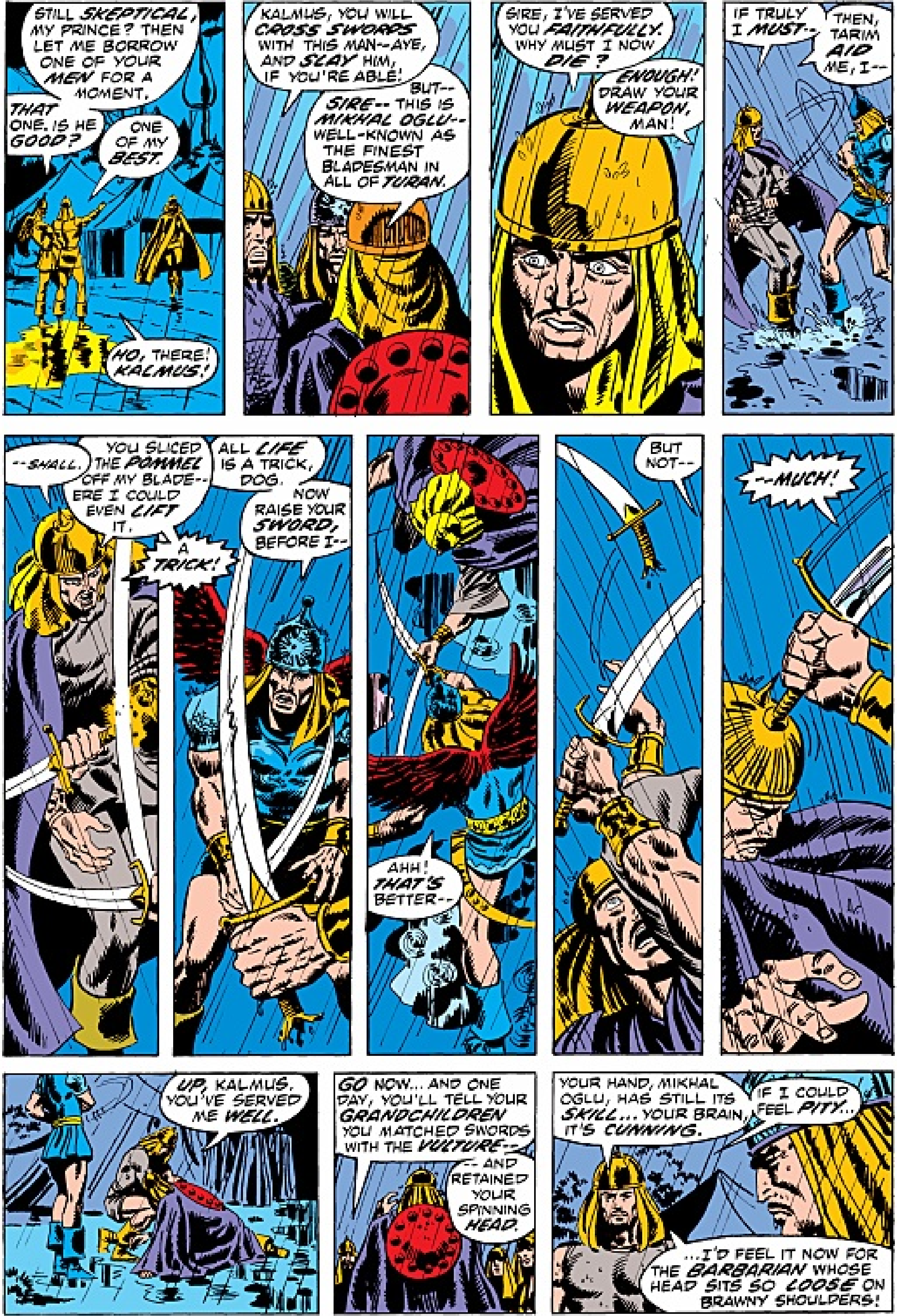

YOU, FELLOW! ARE YOU IN CHARGE OF THIS RABBLE?
THEN TELL THEM TO GIVE WAY!
TALONS OF ERLIK! BEFORE I TAKE ORDERS FROM SOME DUST-CAKED BARBARIAN FRESH OFF THE ROAD, I'LL--
CROM TAKE YOU FOR A FOOL--!
I'VE COME WITH A MESSAGE FROM YOUR KING'S OWN DAUGHTER!
AND I'LL TAKE IT TO HIM, OR KNOW THE REASON--
--WWK.
HAH! THAT'S MORE LIKE IT.
NOW, I THINK I'LL HAVE MY MEN RUN YOU THRU LIKE A DOG, DOG!
BY ISHTAR, I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE RIDDEN WEST, INSTEAD OF COMING HERE.
AND, IF I'D NOT MADE A VOW TO EANNATUM, IN EXCHANGE FOR MY FREEDOM--
EANNATUM? THEN--YOU'VE COME FROM MAKKALET?
SO I'VE BEEN TRYING TO SAY!
THEN COME WITH US --BUT LEAVE YOUR BROADSWORD LYING ON THE FLOOR!
KING GHANNIF WILL SEE YOU. AND, IF HE BELIEVES YOUR STORY...
...YOU MAY EVEN RIDE OUT OF PAH-DISHAH ALIVE.
WAIT HERE, WHILE I SEE IF THE KING IS... INDISPOSED.
IF HE TRIES TO FLEE, MEN--GUT HIM!

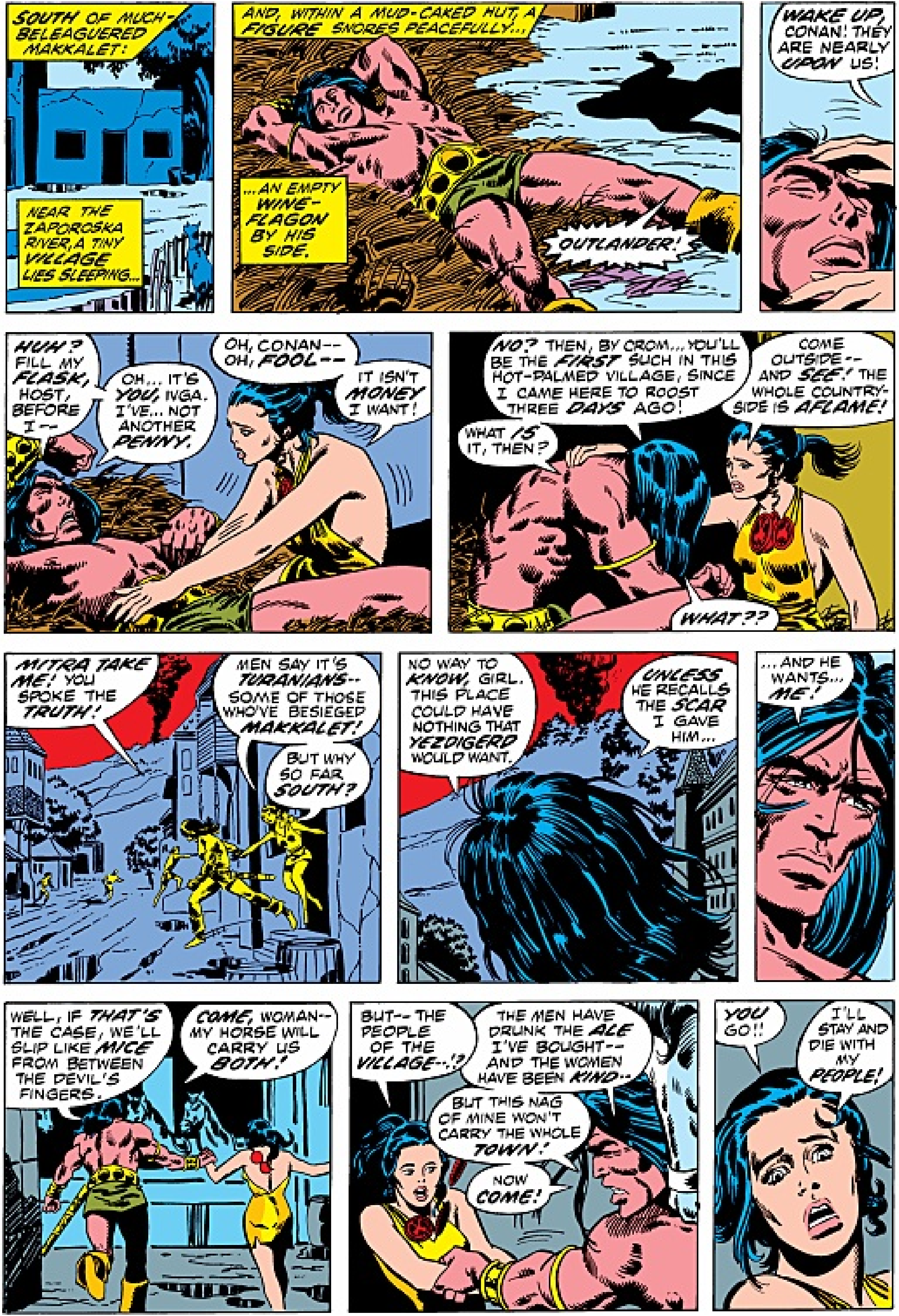

DON'T BOTHER LETTING YOUR SPEAR-HANDS TWITCH, DOGS.
I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
BARBARIAN! YOU MAY ENTER THE PRESENCE!
IT'S ABOUT TIME.
SEEST THOU, O EXALTED OF TARIM? HAVE I EVER LIED TO THEE?
A HEATHEN-- BORN NO DOUBT IN AESGAARD--
--OR ONE OF THOSE OTHER HALF-FABLED LANDS TO THE NORTH AND WEST!
FORGIVE THEE HIS SMELL, HIGHNESS.
YOU THERE! COME FORWARD, STATE YOUR BUSINESS... AND QUICKLY!
I AM CONAN... AND I AM A CIMMERIAN.
I BRING A MESSAGE FROM EANNATUM, KING OF BESIEGED MAKKALET...
...AND HUSBAND TO YOUR FIRSTBORN DAUGHTER.
HE BIDS YOU HONOR THE TREATY SIGNED ON THEIR WEDDING DAY TWO YEARS AGONE...
...AND COME TO HIS AID AGAINST YEZDIGERD, PRINCE OF AGHRAPUR ACROSS THE INLAND SEA...
...LEST ALL THE EAST BE CONSUMED BY THE TORCHES OF TURAN!
THOSE ARE HIS WORDS... MORE OR LESS.
...WELL?
ARE YOU REALLY A...
...A BARBARIAN??
HE NEEDS A BARBER, AT LEAST...
THAT MUCH IS CERTAIN.

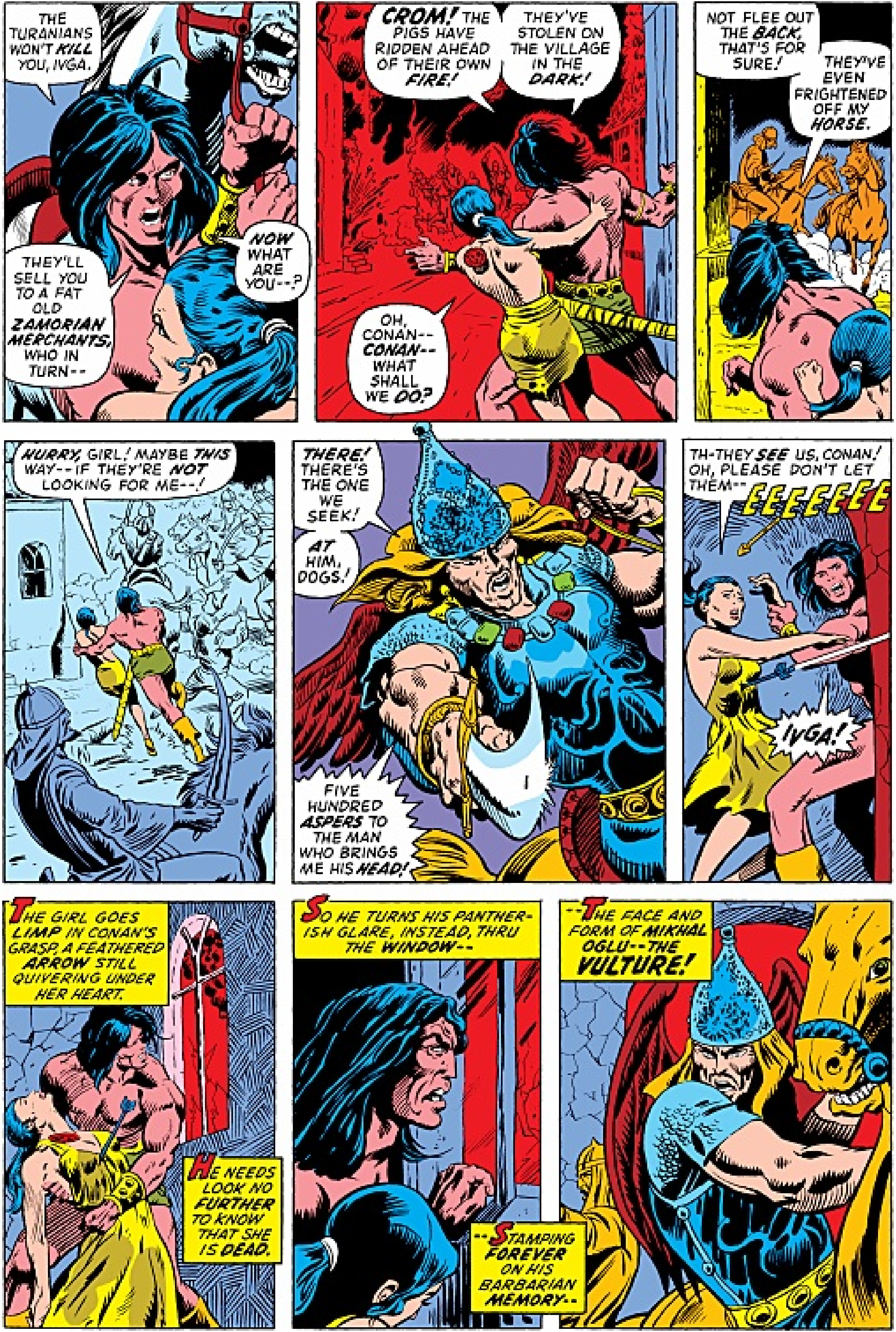

WON'T TALK, EH, MY FINE LAD?
NEVER FEAR, NEVER FEAR... THE PROMISED TROOPS WILL BE DISPATCHED, AND HERE'S A PITTANCE FOR YOUR TRAVAILS.
NOW, ENTERTAIN US WITH TALES--
--ABOUT--
TARIM'S BLOOD! THE HEATHEN JUST TOOK MY SACK OF GOLD--AND WALKED OUT!
HE DIDN'T EVEN KISS MY HAND!
I'LL SEE TO HIM, EXALTED ONE!
YOU INSOLENT SAVAGE! GET BACK IN THERE!
YOU WERE NOT GIVEN LEAVE TO--
EITHER SHEATHE YOUR TONGUE, DOG...
...OR ELSE UNSHEATHE YOUR SWORD.
YOU'VE NO OTHER CHOICE.
FOR A MOMENT IN THE STREETS BELOW, CONAN CONSIDERS SEEKING OUT A TAVERN...
...A FULL-BODIED WENCH...
BUT NO, THIS CITY STINKS TOO MUCH OF CIVILIZATION... AND DECADENCE... AND HOLY WARS FOUGHT OVER CAPTIVE MAN-GODS.
HE'S NO STOMACH FOR IT.
IT IS STARTING TO RAIN WHEN HE DRAWS NEAR A FORK IN THE ROAD.
WESTWARD LIES MAKKALET, WHERE A SMILING YOUNG QUEEN GAVE HIM A RUNE-STUDDED ARMLET AS A PARTING GIFT...
...A GIFT WHICH LATER DREW A STAR-SPAWNED TOAD-THING TO HIM, AS A FLY TO HONEY.
SOUTH, THEN!
FOR, ONLY WHEN ONE IS PENNILESS SHOULD HE SELL HIS SWORD TO MEN WHOSE WIVES HAVE TRIED TO KILL HIM.
NOT MUCH SENSE IN IT, OTHERWISE...

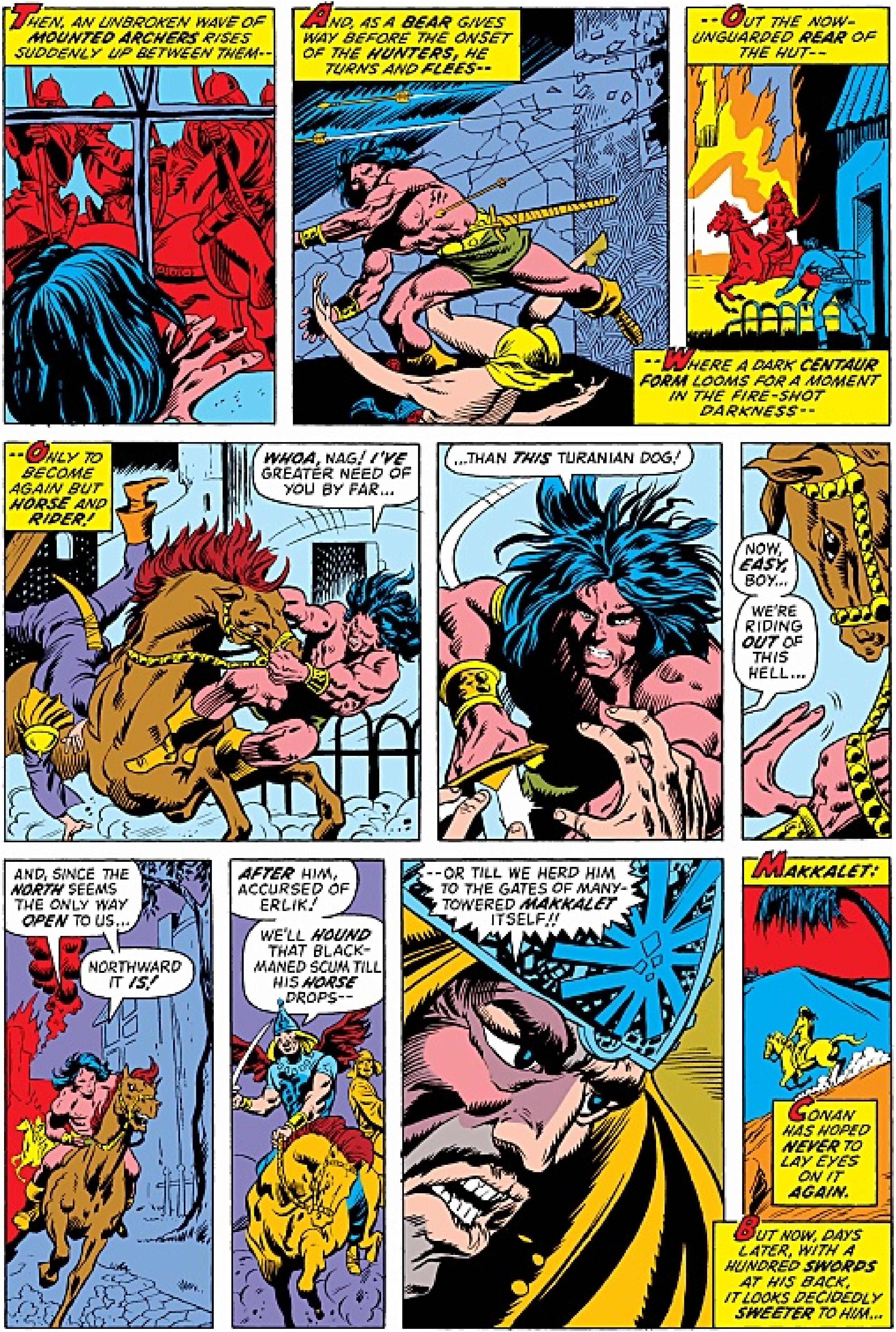

LEAGUES DISTANT, AT THE WATER-EDGE OF THE EVER-BLAZING RING OF FIRE WHICH ENCIRCLES THE CITY-STATE CALLED MAKKALET...
...LIES THE GREAT SPRAWLING PAVILION OF WORLD-RAVENOUS YEZDIGERD.
MY PRINCE...?
AWAKEN, MY PRINCE.
...WHO...!?
YOU!
EVEN YEZDIGERD, RUTHLESS HEIR-APPARENT TO THE THRONE OF TURAN, CAN SCARCELY REPRESS A SHUDDER AT THE DIMLY-ILLUMINED FORM WHICH NOW STANDS BEFORE HIM.
FOR THIS IS MIKHAL OGLU, WHOSE NAME IS A QUIVERING WATCHWORD OF HORROR ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STORM-CURSED VILAYET SEA.
MIKHAL OGLU--MOST NOTED SLAYER IN A NATION OF SLAYERS...
MIKHAL OGLU--CALLED THE VULTURE!
I AM HERE, MY PRINCE.
NOT EVEN THE FIERCE TEMPESTS OF THE INLAND SEA COULD KEEP ME LONG FROM YOUR SIDE.
BETTER TO HAVE YOU AT MY SIDE, OLD FRIEND...
...THAN AT MY BACK.

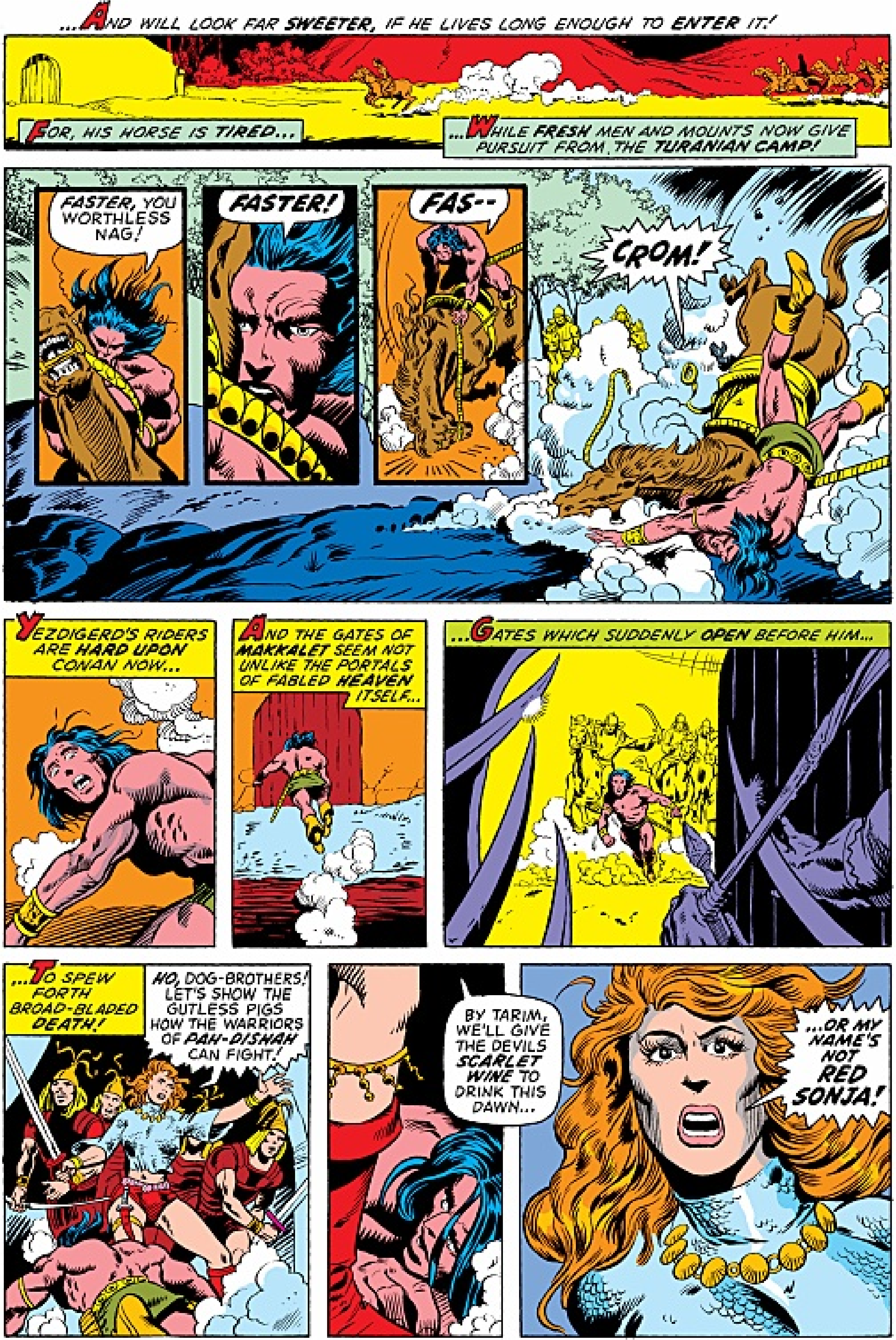

COLD WORDS, SIRE, FOR ONE WHO SERVES YOU SO WELL.
HAVE I NOT BROUGHT FRESH SUPPLIES, YEA, EVEN LUXURIES TO YOUR MEAGRE WAR-CAMP?
YOU'LL SEE THEM ON THE MORROW.
YET, I SENSE YOU'VE A NEW TASK IN STORE FOR MIKHAL OGLU, WHO IS YOUR SCIMITAR-TIP.
YOU ARE WISE BEYOND THE ESTATE OF YOUR BIRTH, MY FRIEND.
KNOW YOU HOW I GAINED.. THIS SCAR?
THE FIRST MAN I SAW HERE TOLD ME.
A PARTING GIFT FROM A BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN WHO NOW FIGHTS FOR MAKKALET.
HIS NAME IS CONAN.
MY SPIES SAY HE'S LEFT THE CITY.
HE MUST DIE, MIKHAL OGLU.
WHY, THEN, DIE HE SHALL -- AYE, AND SOONER THAN HE WOULD!
WHAT'S THAT??
'TIS CALLED A SEEING STONE. I... BORROWED IT RECENTLY FROM A DISCOURTEOUS SHAMAN SOUTH OF AGHRAPUR.
AND WILL IT FIND FOR YOU THE MAN I SEEK?
IT WILL... NOW THAT HE'S NO LONGER SHIELDED BY THE SPELLS WITH WHICH THE WIZARD KHARAM-AKKAD PROTECTS MAKKALET ITSELF!
BUT... I SEE A FLICKER OF DISDAIN IN YOUR EYES, MY PRINCE...
YOU KNOW I PREFER STEEL TO SORCERY--AND YOU WONDER IF MIKHAL OGLU'S PROWESS IS WANING, THAT HE PANDERS TO A THING OF MAGIC.
I KNOW ONLY THAT, WHEN YOU BRING ME THE INFIDEL'S HEAD, YOUR REWARD SHALL BE THRICE ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD.
THEN, NO NIGHT IS DARK ENOUGH TO HIDE HIM FROM ME.
IF I BRING YOU NOT HIS HEAD... I GIVE HIM LEAVE TO SEND YOU MINE!
HE'D TAKE YOU UP ON THAT, I TROW.

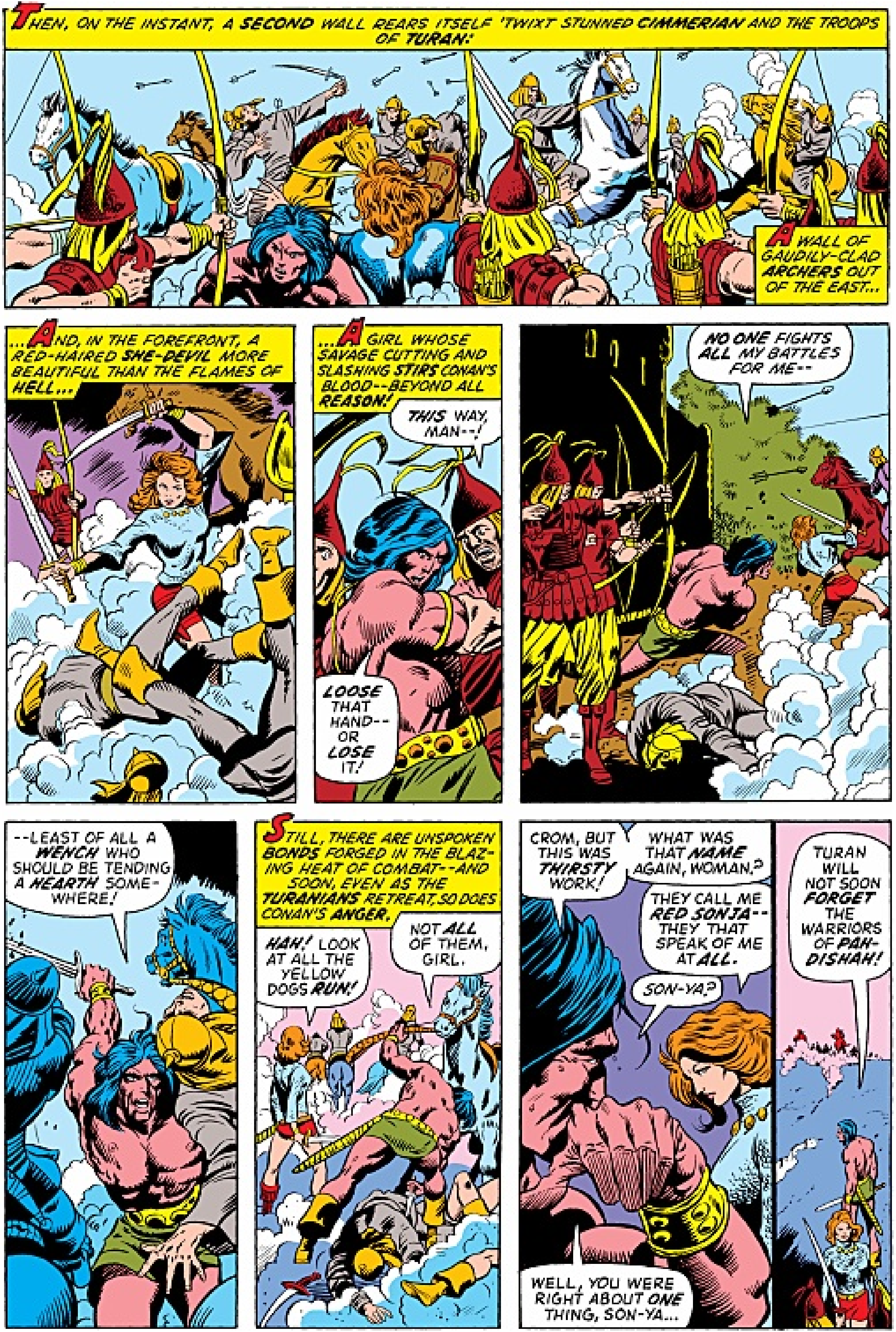

STILL SKEPTICAL, MY PRINCE? THEN LET ME BORROW ONE OF YOUR MEN FOR A MOMENT.
THAT ONE. IS HE GOOD?
ONE OF MY BEST.
HO, THERE! KALMUS!
KALMUS, YOU WILL CROSS SWORDS WITH THIS MAN--AYE, AND SLAY HIM, IF YOU'RE ABLE!
BUT-- SIRE-- THIS IS MIKHAL OGLU-- WELL-KNOWN AS THE FINEST BLADESMAN IN ALL OF TURAN.
SIRE, I'VE SERVED YOU FAITHFULLY. WHY MUST I NOW DIE?
ENOUGH! DRAW YOUR WEAPON, MAN!
IF TRULY I MUST--
THEN, TARIM AID ME, I--
--SHALL.
YOU SLICED THE POMMEL OFF MY BLADE-- ERE I COULD EVEN LIFT IT.
A TRICK!
ALL LIFE IS A TRICK, DOG.
NOW RAISE YOUR SWORD, BEFORE I--
AHH! THAT'S BETTER--
BUT NOT--
--MUCH!
UP, KALMUS. YOU'VE SERVED ME WELL.
GO NOW... AND ONE DAY, YOU'LL TELL YOUR GRANDCHILDREN YOU MATCHED SWORDS WITH THE VULTURE--
-- AND RETAINED YOUR SPINNING HEAD.
YOUR HAND, MIKHAL OGLU, HAS STILL ITS SKILL... YOUR BRAIN, IT'S CUNNING.
IF I COULD FEEL PITY...
...I'D FEEL IT NOW FOR THE BARBARIAN WHOSE HEAD SITS SO LOOSE ON BRAWNY SHOULDERS!

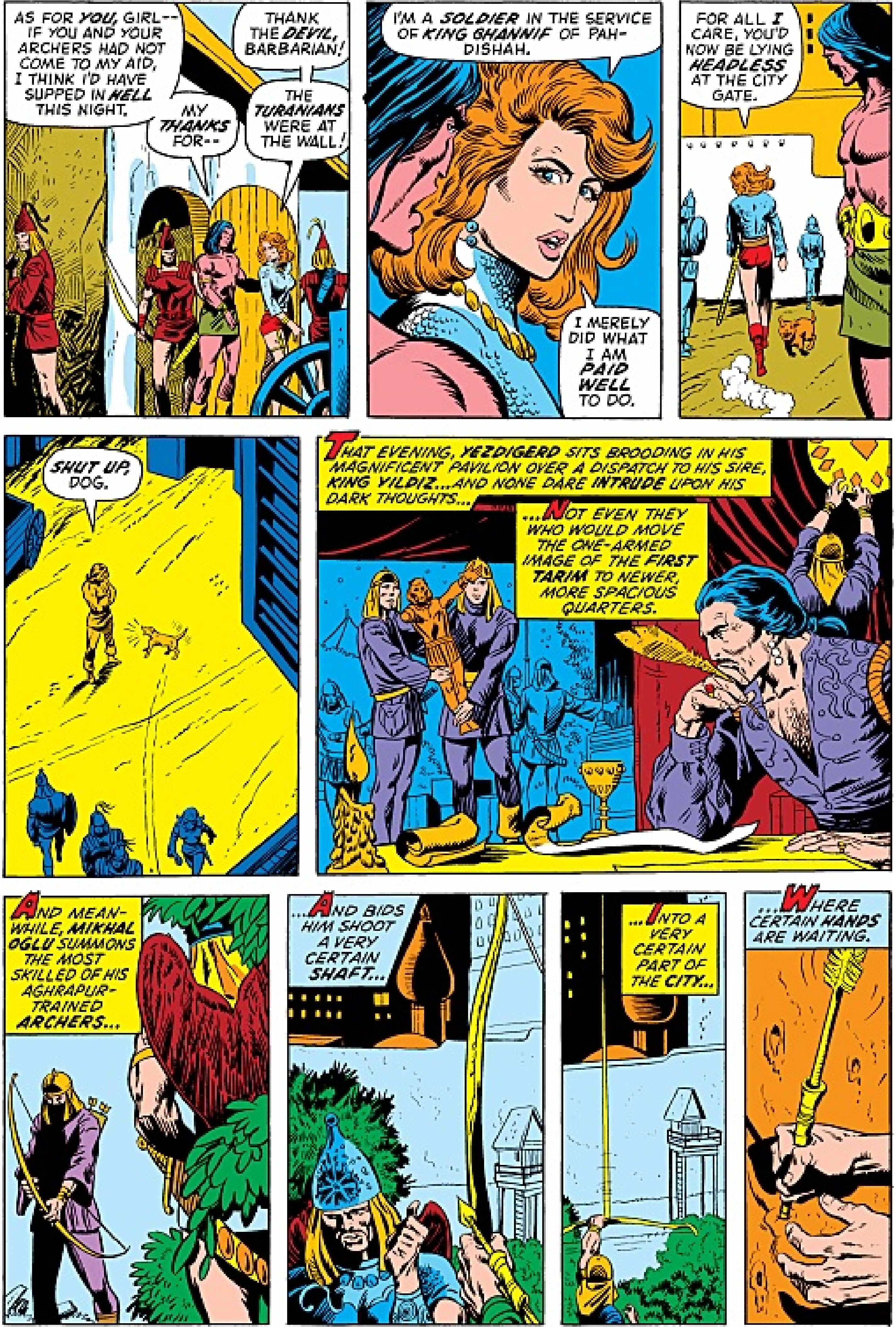

SOUTH OF MUCH-BELEAGUERED MAKKALET:
NEAR THE ZAPOROSKA RIVER, A TINY VILLAGE LIES SLEEPING...
AND, WITHIN A MUD-CAKED HUT, A FIGURE SNORES PEACEFULLY...
...AN EMPTY WINE-FLAGON BY HIS SIDE.
OUTLANDER!
WAKE UP, CONAN! THEY ARE NEARLY UPON US!
HUH? FILL MY FLASK, HOST, BEFORE I--
OH, CONAN-- OH, FOOL--
OH... IT'S YOU, INGA. I'VE... NOT ANOTHER PENNY.
IT ISN'T MONEY I WANT!
NO? THEN, BY CROM... YOU'LL BE THE FIRST SUCH IN THIS HOT-PALMED VILLAGE, SINCE I CAME HERE TO ROOST THREE DAYS AGO!
WHAT IS IT, THEN?
COME OUTSIDE-- AND SEE! THE WHOLE COUNTRYSIDE IS AFLAME!
WHAT??
MITRA TAKE ME! YOU SPOKE THE TRUTH!
MEN SAY IT'S TURANIANS-- SOME OF THOSE WHO'VE BESIEGED MAKKALET!
BUT WHY SO FAR SOUTH?
NO WAY TO KNOW, GIRL. THIS PLACE COULD HAVE NOTHING THAT YEZDIGERD WOULD WANT.
UNLESS HE RECALLS THE SCAR I GAVE HIM...
...AND HE WANTS... ME!
WELL, IF THAT'S THE CASE, WE'LL SLIP LIKE MICE FROM BETWEEN THE DEVIL'S FINGERS.
COME, WOMAN-- MY HORSE WILL CARRY US BOTH!
BUT-- THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE--!?
THE MEN HAVE DRUNK THE ALE I'VE BOUGHT-- AND THE WOMEN HAVE BEEN KIND--
BUT THIS NAG OF MINE WON'T CARRY THE WHOLE TOWN!
NOW COME!
YOU GO!!
I'LL STAY AND DIE WITH MY PEOPLE!

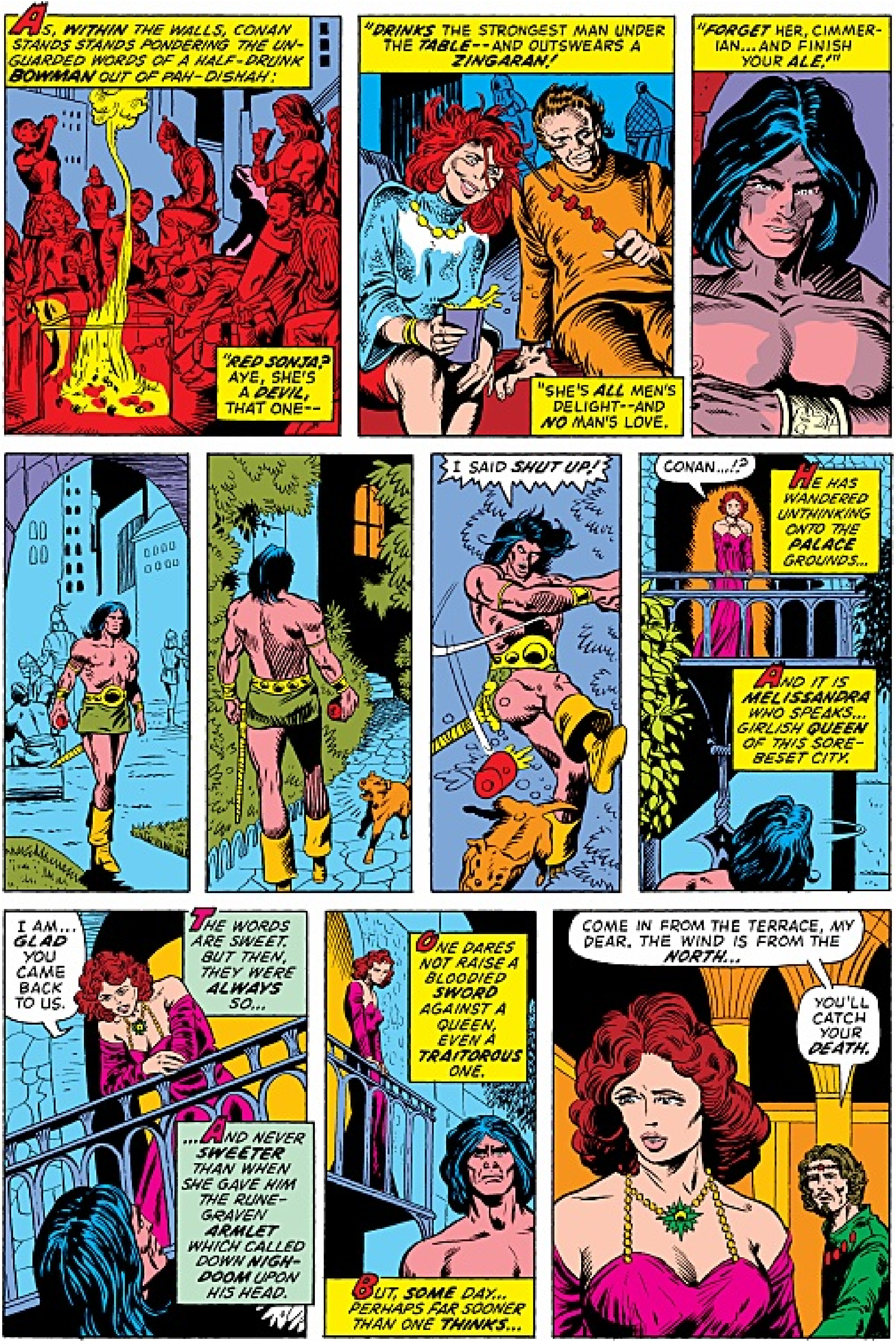

THE TURANIANS WON'T KILL YOU, IVGA.
THEY'LL SELL YOU TO A FAT OLD ZAMORIAN MERCHANTS, WHO IN TURN--
NOW WHAT ARE YOU--?
CROM! THE PIGS HAVE RIDDEN AHEAD OF THEIR OWN FIRE!
THEY'VE STOLEN ON THE VILLAGE IN THE DARK!
OH, CONAN-- CONAN-- WHAT SHALL WE DO?
NOT FLEE OUT THE BACK, THAT'S FOR SURE!
THEY'VE EVEN FRIGHTENED OFF MY HORSE.
HURRY, GIRL! MAYBE THIS WAY--IF THEY'RE NOT LOOKING FOR ME--!
THERE! THERE'S THE ONE WE SEEK!
AT HIM, DOGS!
FIVE HUNDRED ASPERS TO THE MAN WHO BRINGS ME HIS HEAD!
TH-THEY SEE US, CONAN! OH, PLEASE DON'T LET THEM-- EEEEEEE
IVGA!
THE GIRL GOES LIMP IN CONAN'S GRASP, A FEATHERED ARROW STILL QUIVERING UNDER HER HEART.
HE NEEDS LOOK NO FURTHER TO KNOW THAT SHE IS DEAD.
SO HE TURNS HIS PANTHER-ISH GLARE, INSTEAD, THRU THE WINDOW--
--STAMPING FOREVER ON HIS BARBARIAN MEMORY--
--THE FACE AND FORM OF MIKHAL OGLU--THE VULTURE!

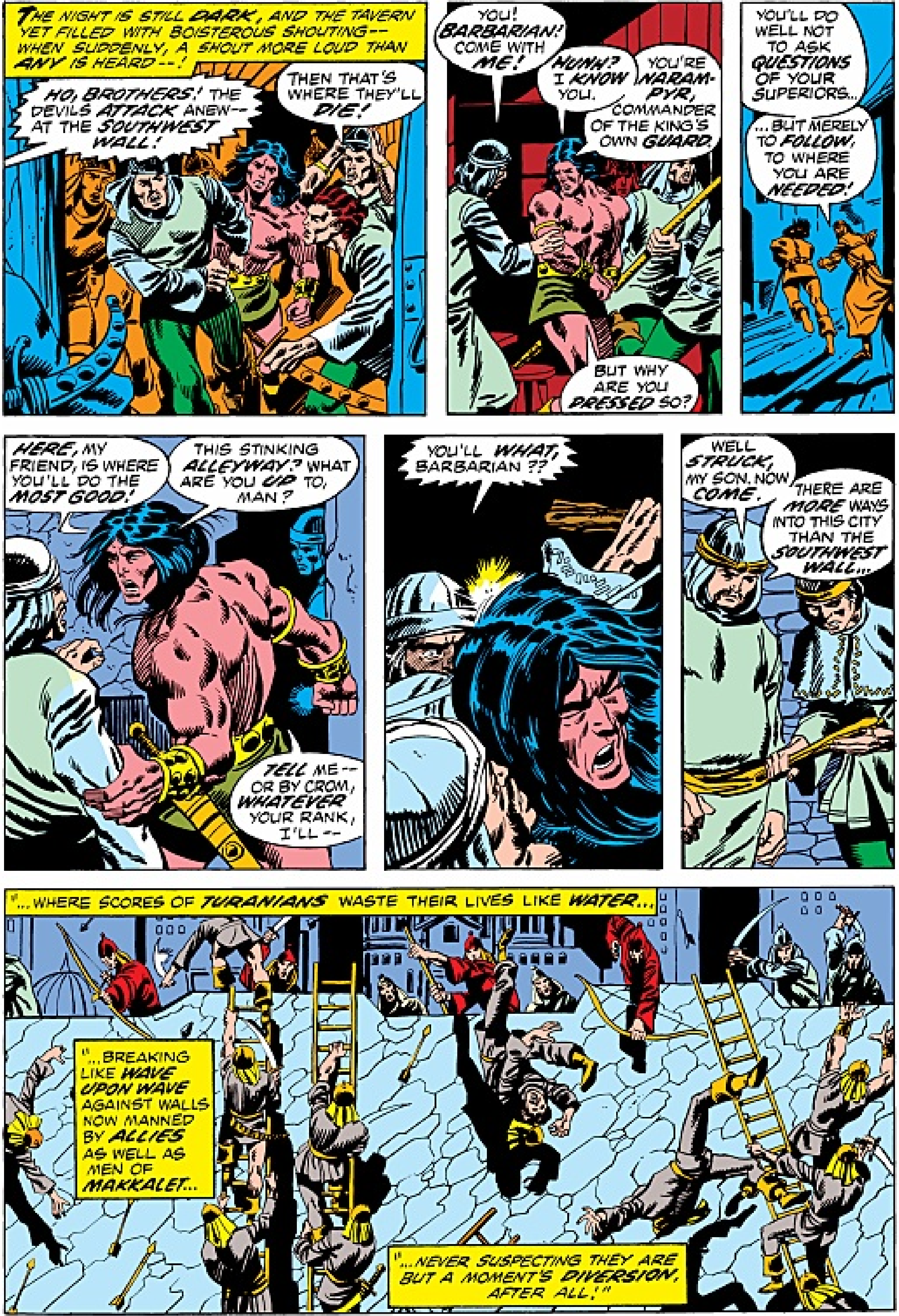

THEN, AN UNBROKEN WAVE OF MOUNTED ARCHERS RISES SUDDENLY UP BETWEEN THEM--
AND, AS A BEAR GIVES WAY BEFORE THE ONSET OF THE HUNTERS, HE TURNS AND FLEES--
--OUT THE NOW-UNGUARDED REAR OF THE HUT--
--WHERE A DARK CENTAUR FORM LOOMS FOR A MOMENT IN THE FIRE-SHOT DARKNESS--
--ONLY TO BECOME AGAIN BUT HORSE AND RIDER!
WHOA, NAG! I'VE GREATER NEED OF YOU BY FAR...
...THAN THIS TURANIAN DOG!
NOW, EASY, BOY...
WE'RE RIDING OUT OF THIS HELL...
AND, SINCE THE NORTH SEEMS THE ONLY WAY OPEN TO US...
NORTHWARD IT IS!
AFTER HIM, ACCURSED OF ERLIK!
WE'LL HOUND THAT BLACK-MANED SCUM TILL HIS HORSE DROPS--
--OR TILL WE HERD HIM TO THE GATES OF MANY-TOWERED MAKKALET ITSELF!!
MAKKALET:
CONAN HAS HOPED NEVER TO LAY EYES ON IT AGAIN.
BUT NOW, DAYS LATER, WITH A HUNDRED SWORDS AT HIS BACK, IT LOOKS DECIDEDLY SWEETER TO HIM...

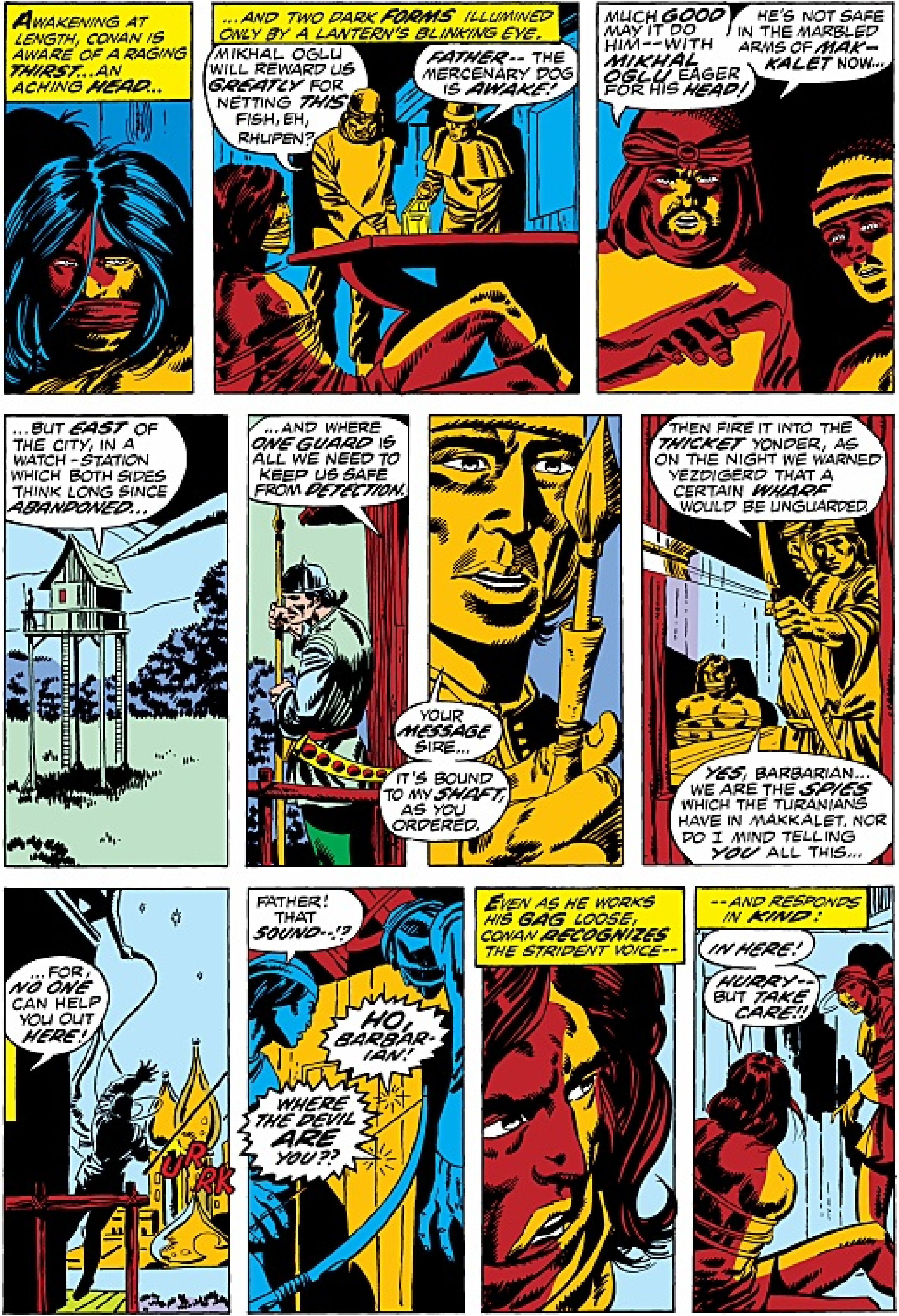

...AND WILL LOOK FAR SWEETER, IF HE LIVES LONG ENOUGH TO ENTER IT!
FOR, HIS HORSE IS TIRED...
...WHILE FRESH MEN AND MOUNTS NOW GIVE PURSUIT FROM THE TURANIAN CAMP!
FASTER, YOU WORTHLESS NAG!
FASTER!
FAS--
CROM!
YEZDIGERD'S RIDERS ARE HARD UPON CONAN NOW...
AND THE GATES OF MAKKALET SEEM NOT UNLIKE THE PORTALS OF FABLED HEAVEN ITSELF...
...GATES WHICH SUDDENLY OPEN BEFORE HIM...
...TO SPEW FORTH BROAD-BLADED DEATH!
NO, DOG-BROTHERS! LET'S SHOW THE GUTLESS PIGS HOW THE WARRIORS OF PAH-DISHAH CAN FIGHT!
BY TARIM, WE'LL GIVE THE DEVILS SCARLET WINE TO DRINK THIS DAWN...
...OR MY NAME'S NOT RED SONJA!

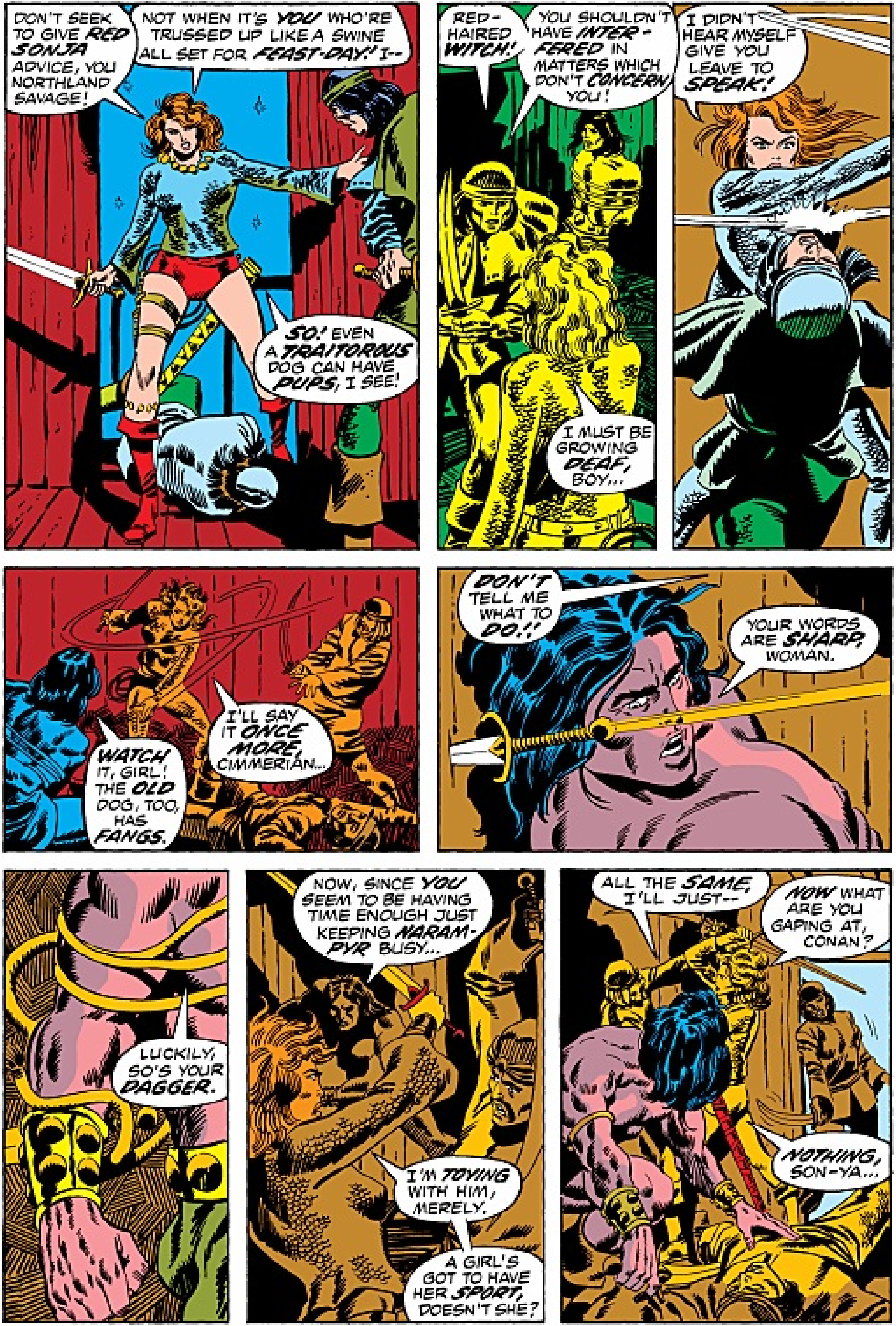

THEN, ON THE INSTANT, A SECOND WALL REARS ITSELF 'TWIXT STUNNED CIMMERIAN AND THE TROOPS OF TURAN:
A WALL OF GAUDILY-CLAD ARCHERS OUT OF THE EAST...
...AND, IN THE FOREFRONT, A RED-HAIRED SHE-DEVIL MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN THE FLAMES OF HELL...
...A GIRL WHOSE SAVAGE CUTTING AND SLASHING STIRS CONAN'S BLOOD--BEYOND ALL REASON!
THIS WAY, MAN--!
LOOSE THAT HAND--OR LOSE IT!
NO ONE FIGHTS ALL MY BATTLES FOR ME--
--LEAST OF ALL A WENCH WHO SHOULD BE TENDING A HEARTH SOMEWHERE!
STILL, THERE ARE UNSPOKEN BONDS FORGED IN THE BLAZING HEAT OF COMBAT--AND SOON, EVEN AS THE TURANIANS RETREAT, SO DOES CONAN'S ANGER.
HAH! LOOK AT ALL THE YELLOW DOGS RUN!
NOT ALL OF THEM, GIRL.
CROM, BUT THIS WAS THIRSTY WORK!
WHAT WAS THAT NAME AGAIN, WOMAN?
THEY CALL ME RED SONJA--THEY THAT SPEAK OF ME AT ALL.
SON-YA?
WELL, YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING, SON-YA...
TURAN WILL NOT SOON FORGET THE WARRIORS OF PAH-DISHAH!

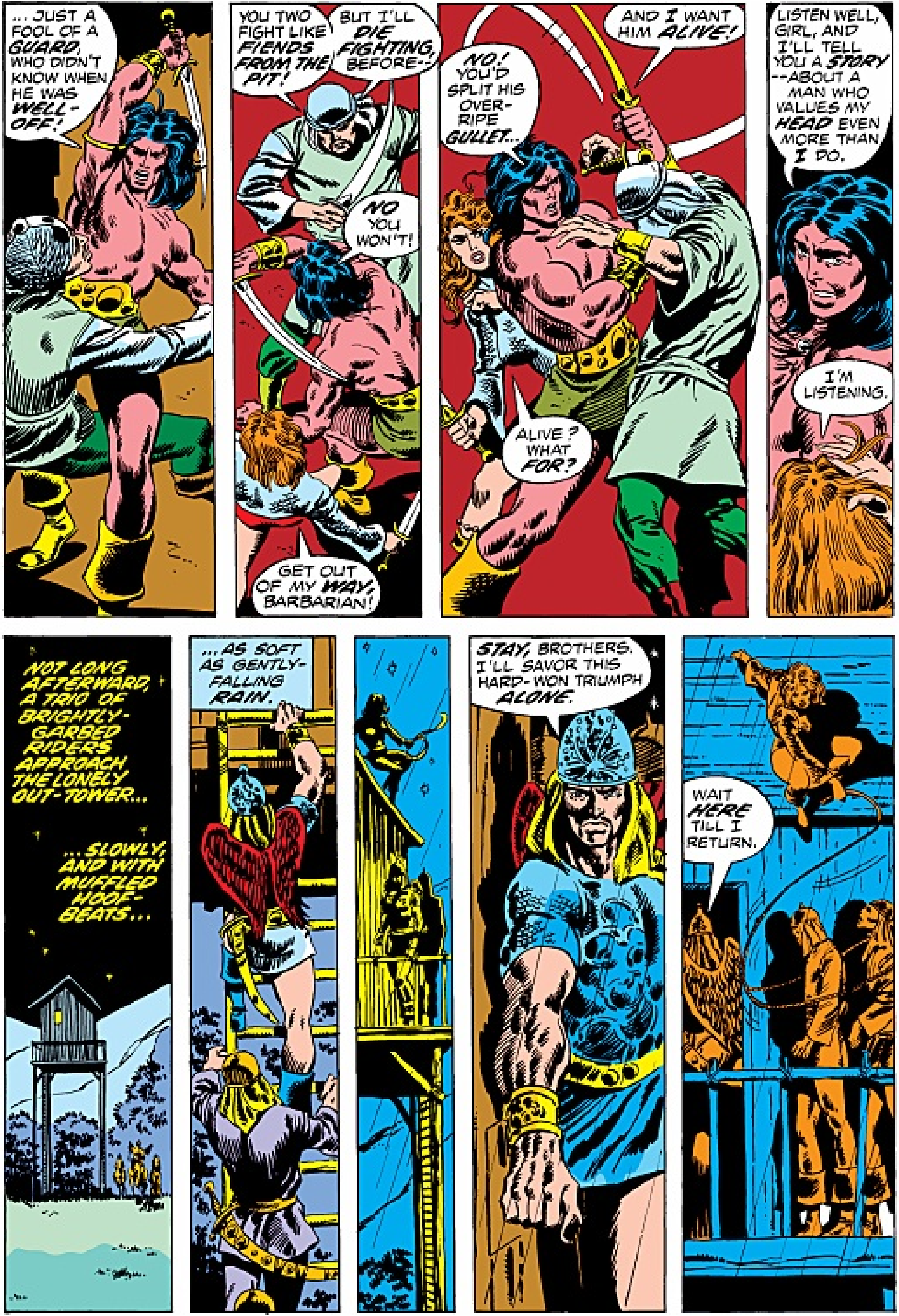

AS FOR YOU, GIRL-- IF YOU AND YOUR ARCHERS HAD NOT COME TO MY AID, I THINK I'D HAVE SUPPED IN HELL THIS NIGHT.
MY THANKS FOR--
THANK THE DEVIL, BARBARIAN!
THE TURANIANS WERE AT THE WALL!
I'M A SOLDIER IN THE SERVICE OF KING GHANNIF OF PAH-DISHAH.
I MERELY DID WHAT I AM PAID WELL TO DO.
FOR ALL I CARE, YOU'D NOW BE LYING HEADLESS AT THE CITY GATE.
SHUT UP, DOG.
THAT EVENING, YEZDIGERD SITS BROODING IN HIS MAGNIFICENT PAVILION OVER A DISPATCH TO HIS SIRE, KING YILDIZ...AND NONE DARE INTRUDE UPON HIS DARK THOUGHTS...
...NOT EVEN THEY WHO WOULD MOVE THE ONE-ARMED IMAGE OF THE FIRST TARIM TO NEWER, MORE SPACIOUS QUARTERS.
AND MEANWHILE, MIKHAL OGLU SUMMONS THE MOST SKILLED OF HIS AGHRAPUR-TRAINED ARCHERS...
...AND BIDS HIM SHOOT A VERY CERTAIN SHAFT...
...INTO A VERY CERTAIN PART OF THE CITY...
...WHERE CERTAIN HANDS ARE WAITING.

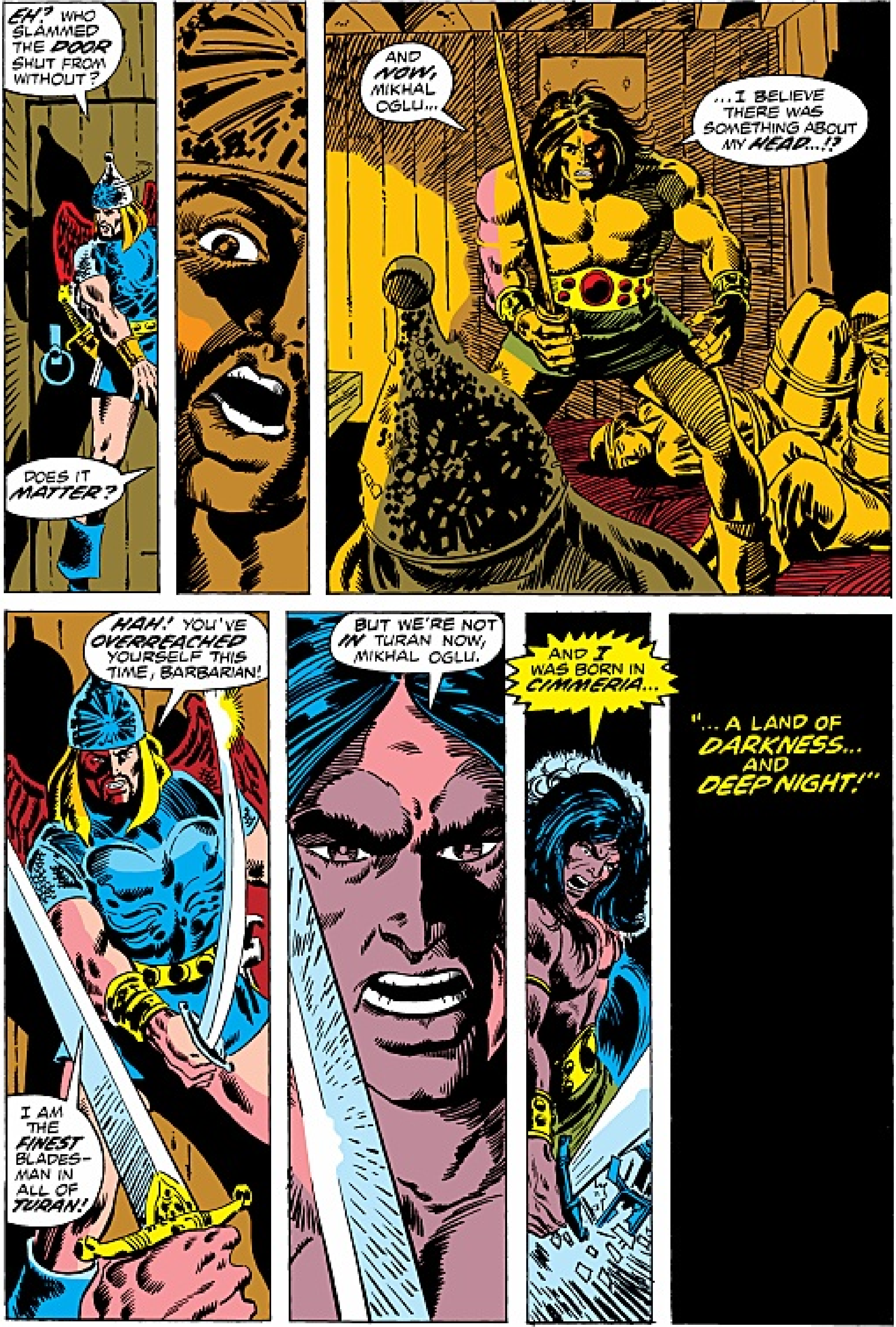

AS, WITHIN THE WALLS, CONAN STANDS STANDS PONDERING THE UNGUARDED WORDS OF A HALF-DRUNK BOWMAN OUT OF PAH-DISHAH:
"RED SONJA? AYE, SHE'S A DEVIL, THAT ONE--
"DRINKS THE STRONGEST MAN UNDER THE TABLE--AND OUTSWEARS A ZINGARAN!
"SHE'S ALL MEN'S DELIGHT--AND NO MAN'S LOVE.
"FORGET HER, CIMMERIAN... AND FINISH YOUR ALE!"
I SAID SHUT UP!
CONAN...!?
HE HAS WANDERED UNTHINKING ONTO THE PALACE GROUNDS...
AND IT IS MELISSANDRA WHO SPEAKS... GIRLISH QUEEN OF THIS SORE-BESET CITY.
I AM... GLAD YOU CAME BACK TO US.
THE WORDS ARE SWEET. BUT THEN, THEY WERE ALWAYS SO...
...AND NEVER SWEETER THAN WHEN SHE GAVE HIM THE RUNE-GRAVEN ARMLET WHICH CALLED DOWN NIGH-DOOM UPON HIS HEAD.
ONE DARES NOT RAISE A BLOODIED SWORD AGAINST A QUEEN, EVEN A TRAITOROUS ONE.
BUT, SOME DAY... PERHAPS FAR SOONER THAN ONE THINKS...
COME IN FROM THE TERRACE, MY DEAR. THE WIND IS FROM THE NORTH...
YOU'LL CATCH YOUR DEATH.

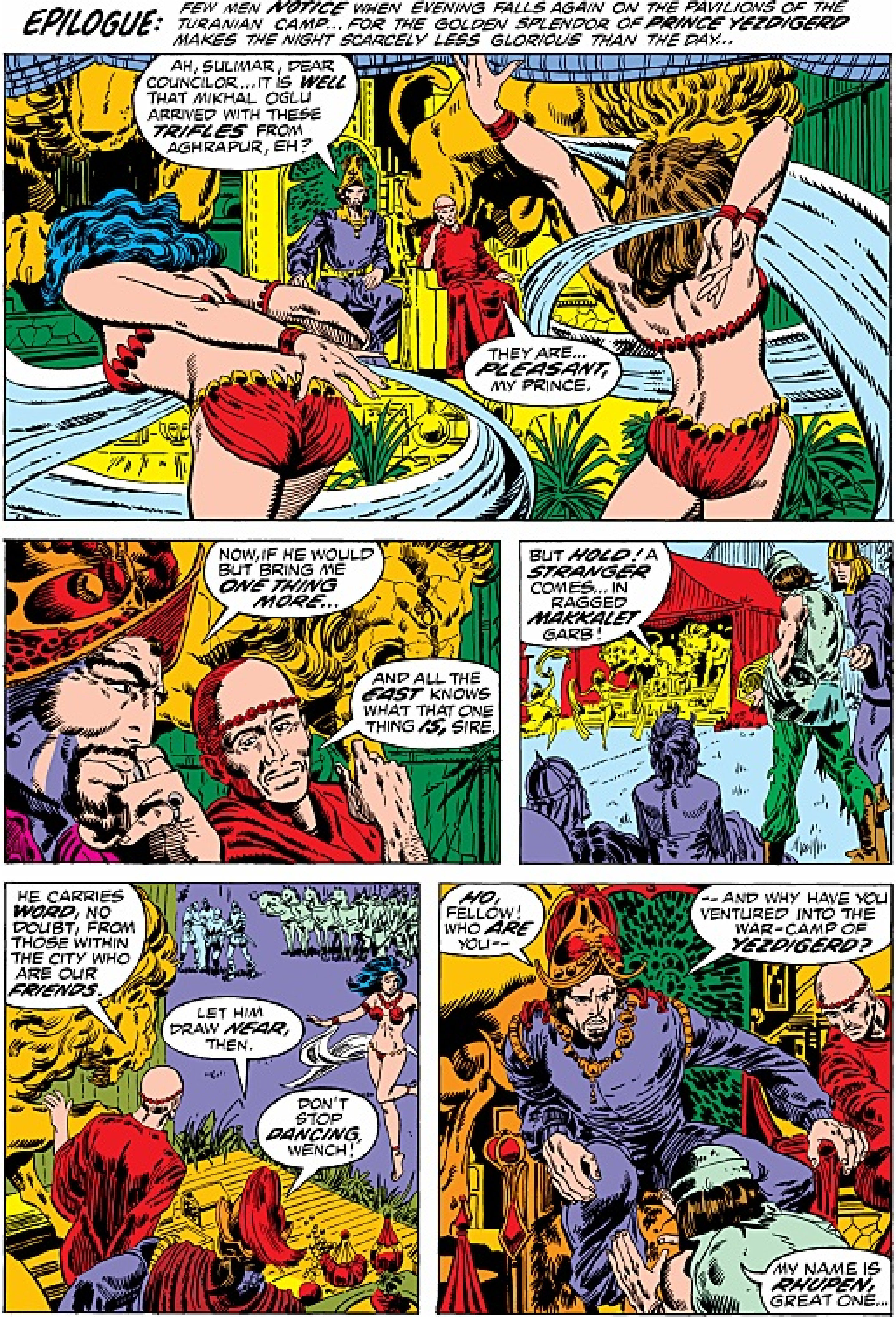

THE NIGHT IS STILL DARK, AND THE TAVERN YET FILLED WITH BOISTEROUS SHOUTING-- WHEN SUDDENLY, A SHOUT MORE LOUD THAN ANY IS HEARD--!
HO, BROTHERS! THE DEVILS ATTACK ANEW-- AT THE SOUTHWEST WALL!
THEN THAT'S WHERE THEY'LL DIE!
YOU! BARBARIAN! COME WITH ME!
HUHH? I KNOW YOU.
YOU'RE NARAMPYR, COMMANDER OF THE KING'S OWN GUARD.
BUT WHY ARE YOU PRESSED SO?
YOU'LL DO WELL NOT TO ASK QUESTIONS OF YOUR SUPERIORS...
...BUT MERELY TO FOLLOW, TO WHERE YOU ARE NEEDED!
HERE, MY FRIEND, IS WHERE YOU'LL DO THE MOST GOOD!
THIS STINKING ALLEYWAY? WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, MAN?
TELL ME-- OR BY CROM, WHATEVER YOUR RANK, I'LL--
YOU'LL WHAT, BARBARIAN??
WELL STRUCK, MY SON. NOW COME.
THERE ARE MORE WAYS INTO THIS CITY THAN THE SOUTHWEST WALL...
"...WHERE SCORES OF TURANIANS WASTE THEIR LIVES LIKE WATER...
"...BREAKING LIKE WAVE UPON WAVE AGAINST WALLS NOW MANNED BY ALLIES AS WELL AS MEN OF MAKKALET...
"...NEVER SUSPECTING THEY ARE BUT A MOMENT'S DIVERSION, AFTER ALL!"

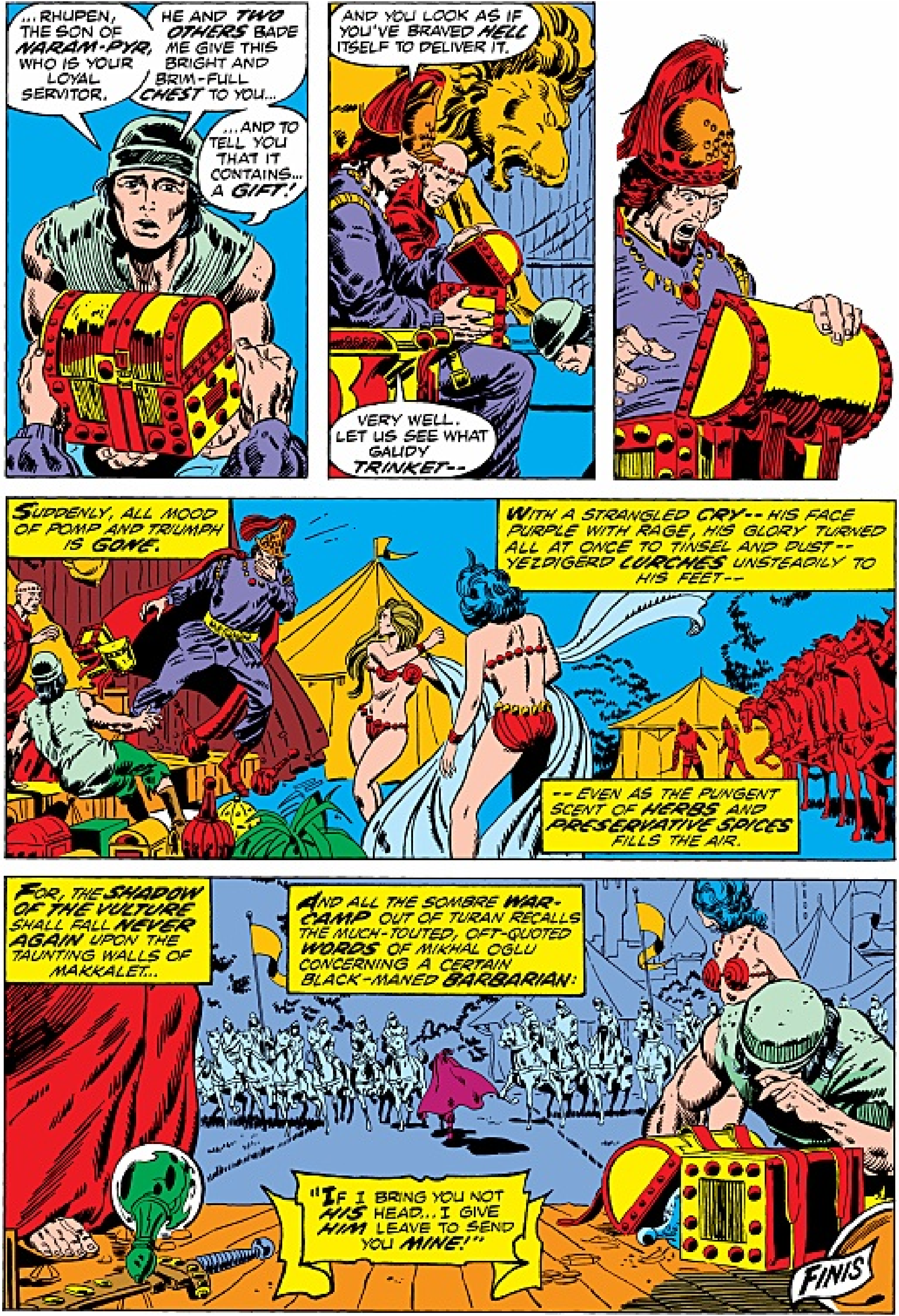

AWAKENING AT LENGTH, CONAN IS AWARE OF A RAGING THIRST...AN ACHING HEAD...
...AND TWO DARK FORMS ILLUMINED ONLY BY A LANTERN'S BLINKING EYE.
MIKHAL OGLU WILL REWARD US GREATLY FOR NETTING THIS FISH, EH, RHUPEN?
FATHER-- THE MERCENARY DOG IS AWAKE!
MUCH GOOD MAY IT DO HIM--WITH MIKHAL OGLU EAGER FOR HIS HEAD!
HE'S NOT SAFE IN THE MARBLED ARMS OF MAKKALET NOW...
...BUT EAST OF THE CITY, IN A WATCH-STATION WHICH BOTH SIDES THINK LONG SINCE ABANDONED...
...AND WHERE ONE GUARD IS ALL WE NEED TO KEEP US SAFE FROM DETECTION.
YOUR MESSAGE SIRE...
IT'S BOUND TO MY SHAFT, AS YOU ORDERED.
THEN FIRE IT INTO THE THICKET YONDER, AS ON THE NIGHT WE WARNED YEZDIGERD THAT A CERTAIN WHARF WOULD BE UNGUARDED.
YES, BARBARIAN... WE ARE THE SPIES WHICH THE TURANIANS HAVE IN MAKKALET. NOR DO I MIND TELLING YOU ALL THIS...
...FOR, NO ONE CAN HELP YOU OUT HERE!
URRK
FATHER! THAT SOUND--!?
HO, BARBARIAN!
WHERE THE DEVIL ARE YOU??
EVEN AS HE WORKS HIS GAG LOOSE, CONAN RECOGNIZES THE STRIDENT VOICE--
--AND RESPONDS IN KIND:
IN HERE!
HURRY--BUT TAKE CARE!!

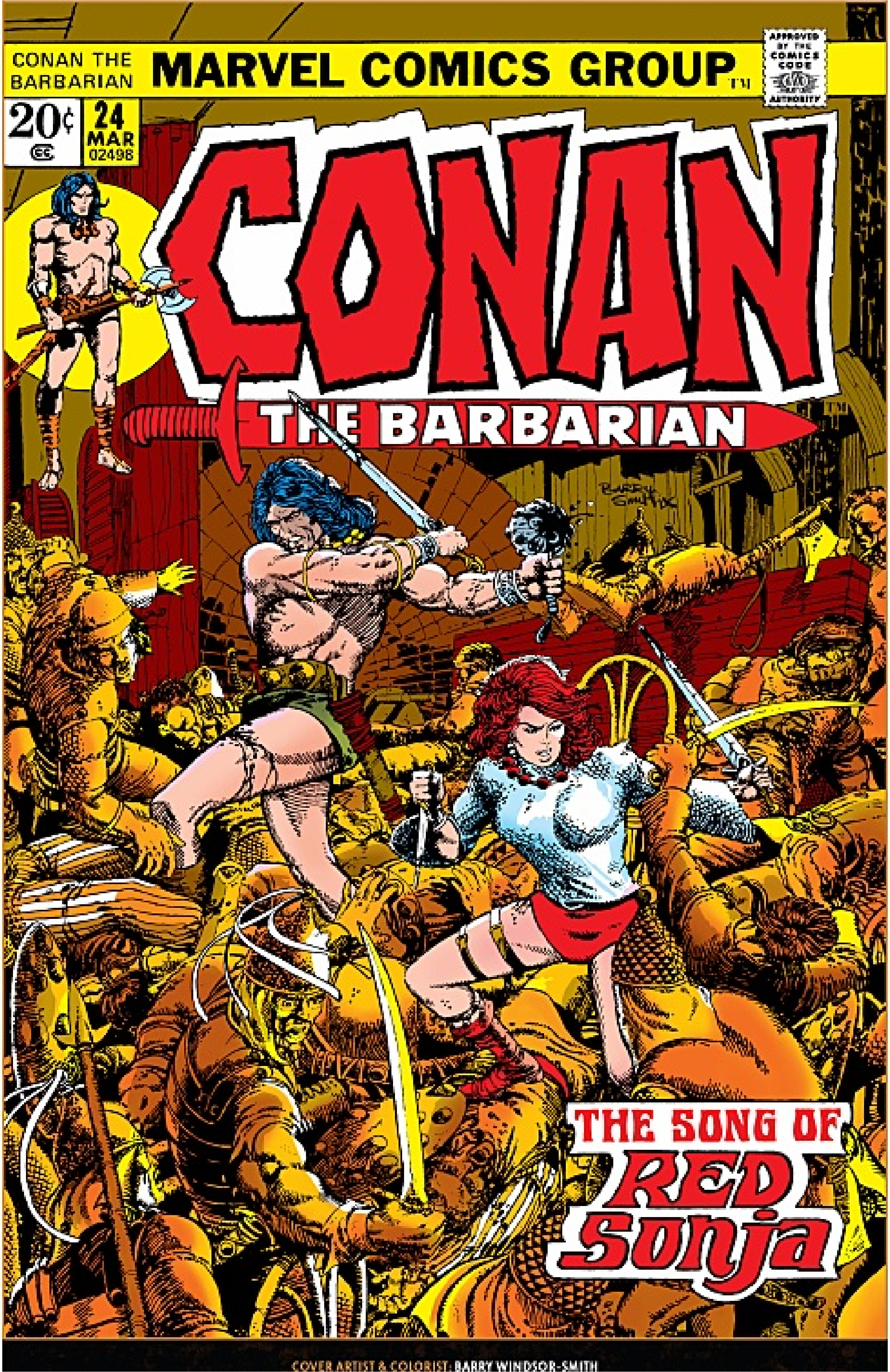

DON'T SEEK TO GIVE RED SONJA ADVICE, YOU NORTHLAND SAVAGE!
NOT WHEN IT'S YOU WHO'RE TRUSSED UP LIKE A SWINE ALL SET FOR FEAST-DAY! I--
SO! EVEN A TRAITOROUS DOG CAN HAVE PUPS, I SEE!
RED-HAIRED WITCH!
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE INTERFERED IN MATTERS WHICH DON'T CONCERN YOU!
I MUST BE GROWING DEAF, BOY...
I DIDN'T HEAR MYSELF GIVE YOU LEAVE TO SPEAK!
WATCH IT, GIRL! THE OLD DOG, TOO, HAS FANGS.
I'LL SAY IT ONCE MORE, CIMMERIAN...
DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!!
YOUR WORDS ARE SHARP, WOMAN.
LUCKILY, SO'S YOUR DAGGER.
NOW, SINCE YOU SEEM TO BE HAVING TIME ENOUGH JUST KEEPING NARAMPYR BUSY...
I'M TOYING WITH HIM, MERELY.
A GIRL'S GOT TO HAVE HER SPORT, DOESN'T SHE?
ALL THE SAME, I'LL JUST--
NOW WHAT ARE YOU GAPING AT, CONAN?
NOTHING, SON-YA...


...JUST A FOOL OF A GUARD, WHO DIDN'T KNOW WHEN HE WAS WELL-OFF!
YOU TWO FIGHT LIKE FIENDS FROM THE PIT!
BUT I'LL DIE FIGHTING, BEFORE--
NO YOU WON'T!
GET OUT OF MY WAY, BARBARIAN!
NO! YOU'D SPLIT HIS OVER-RIPE GULLET...
AND I WANT HIM ALIVE!
ALIVE? WHAT FOR?
LISTEN WELL, GIRL, AND I'LL TELL YOU A STORY --ABOUT A MAN WHO VALUES MY HEAD EVEN MORE THAN I DO.
I'M LISTENING.
NOT LONG AFTERWARD, A TRIO OF BRIGHTLY-GARBED RIDERS APPROACH THE LONELY OUT-TOWER...
...SLOWLY, AND WITH MUFFLED HOOF-BEATS...
...AS SOFT AS GENTLY-FALLING RAIN.
STAY, BROTHERS. I'LL SAVOR THIS HARD-WON TRIUMPH ALONE.
WAIT HERE TILL I RETURN.


EH? WHO SLAMMED THE DOOR SHUT FROM WITHOUT?
DOES IT MATTER?
AND NOW, MIKHAL OGLU...
...I BELIEVE THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT MY HEAD...!?
HAH! YOU'VE OVERREACHED YOURSELF THIS TIME, BARBARIAN!
I AM THE FINEST BLADESMAN IN ALL OF TURAN!
BUT WE'RE NOT IN TURAN NOW, MIKHAL OGLU.
AND I WAS BORN IN CIMMERIA...
"... A LAND OF DARKNESS... AND DEEP NIGHT!"


EPILOGUE: FEW MEN NOTICE WHEN EVENING FALLS AGAIN ON THE PAVILIONS OF THE TURANIAN CAMP... FOR THE GOLDEN SPLENDOR OF PRINCE YEZDIGERD MAKES THE NIGHT SCARCELY LESS GLORIOUS THAN THE DAY...
AH, SULIMAR, DEAR COUNCILOR... IT IS WELL THAT MIKHAL OGLU ARRIVED WITH THESE TRIFLES FROM AGHRAPUR, EH?
THEY ARE... PLEASANT, MY PRINCE.
NOW, IF HE WOULD BUT BRING ME ONE THING MORE...
AND ALL THE EAST KNOWS WHAT THAT ONE THING IS, SIRE.
BUT HOLD! A STRANGER COMES... IN RAGGED MAKKALET GARB!
HE CARRIES WORD, NO DOUBT, FROM THOSE WITHIN THE CITY WHO ARE OUR FRIENDS.
LET HIM DRAW NEAR, THEN.
DON'T STOP DANCING, WENCH!
HO, FELLOW! WHO ARE YOU--
--AND WHY HAVE YOU VENTURED INTO THE WAR-CAMP OF YEZDIGERD?
MY NAME IS RHUPEN, GREAT ONE...


...RHUPEN, THE SON OF NARAM-PYR, WHO IS YOUR LOYAL SERVITOR.
HE AND TWO OTHERS BADE ME GIVE THIS BRIGHT AND BRIM-FULL CHEST TO YOU...
...AND TO TELL YOU THAT IT CONTAINS... A GIFT!
AND YOU LOOK AS IF YOU'VE BRAVED HELL ITSELF TO DELIVER IT.
VERY WELL. LET US SEE WHAT GAUDY TRINKET--
SUDDENLY, ALL MOOD OF POMP AND TRIUMPH IS GONE.
WITH A STRANGLED CRY-- HIS FACE PURPLE WITH RAGE, HIS GLORY TURNED ALL AT ONCE TO TINSEL AND DUST-- YEZDIGERD LURCHES UNSTEADILY TO HIS FEET--
--EVEN AS THE PUNGENT SCENT OF HERBS AND PRESERVATIVE SPICES FILLS THE AIR.
FOR, THE SHADOW OF THE VULTURE SHALL FALL NEVER AGAIN UPON THE TAUNTING WALLS OF MAKKALET...
AND ALL THE SOMBRE WAR-CAMP OUT OF TURAN RECALLS THE MUCH-TOUTED, OFT-QUOTED WORDS OF MIKHAL OGLU CONCERNING A CERTAIN BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN:
"IF I BRING YOU NOT HIS HEAD...I GIVE HIM LEAVE TO SEND YOU MINE!"
FINIS


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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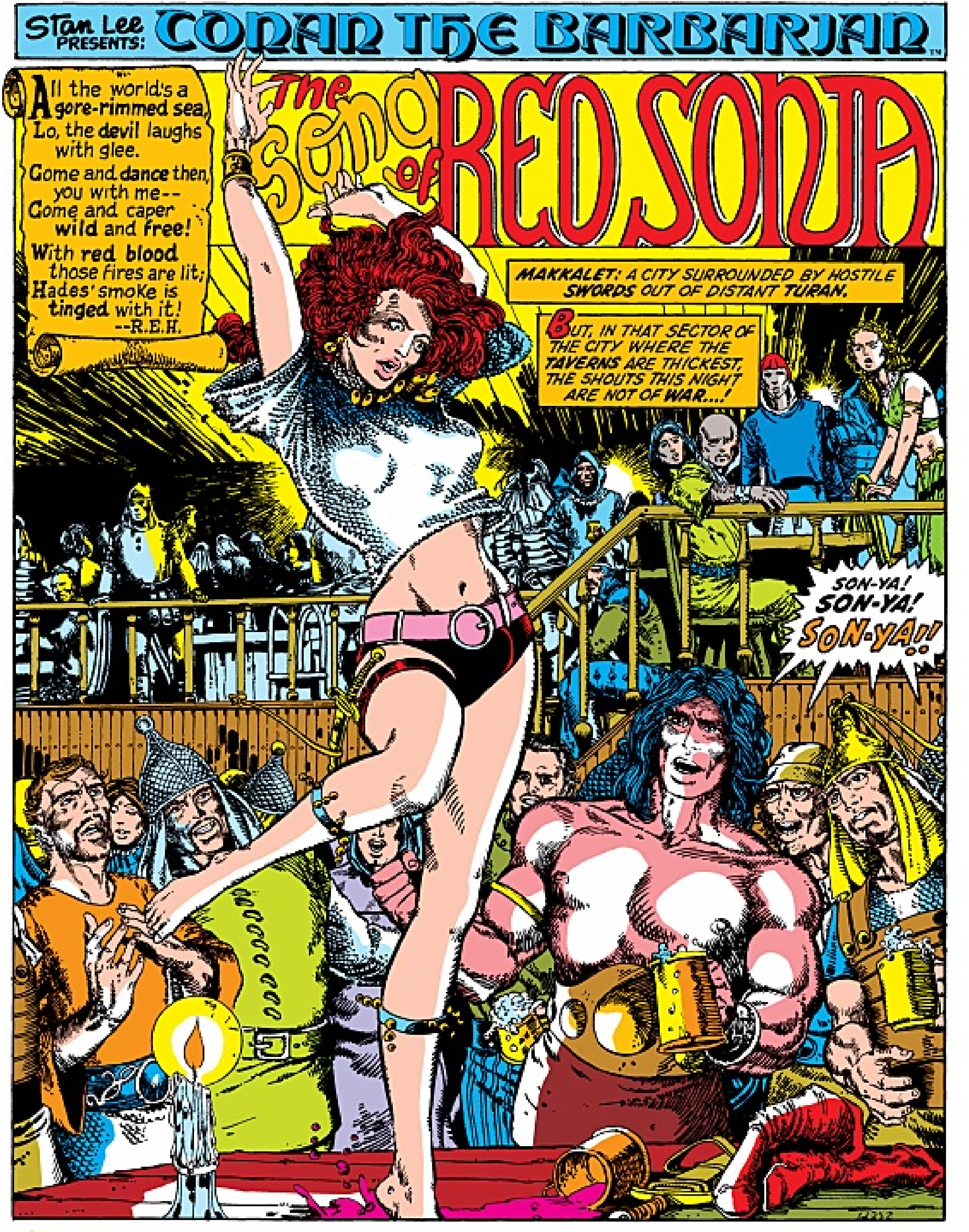
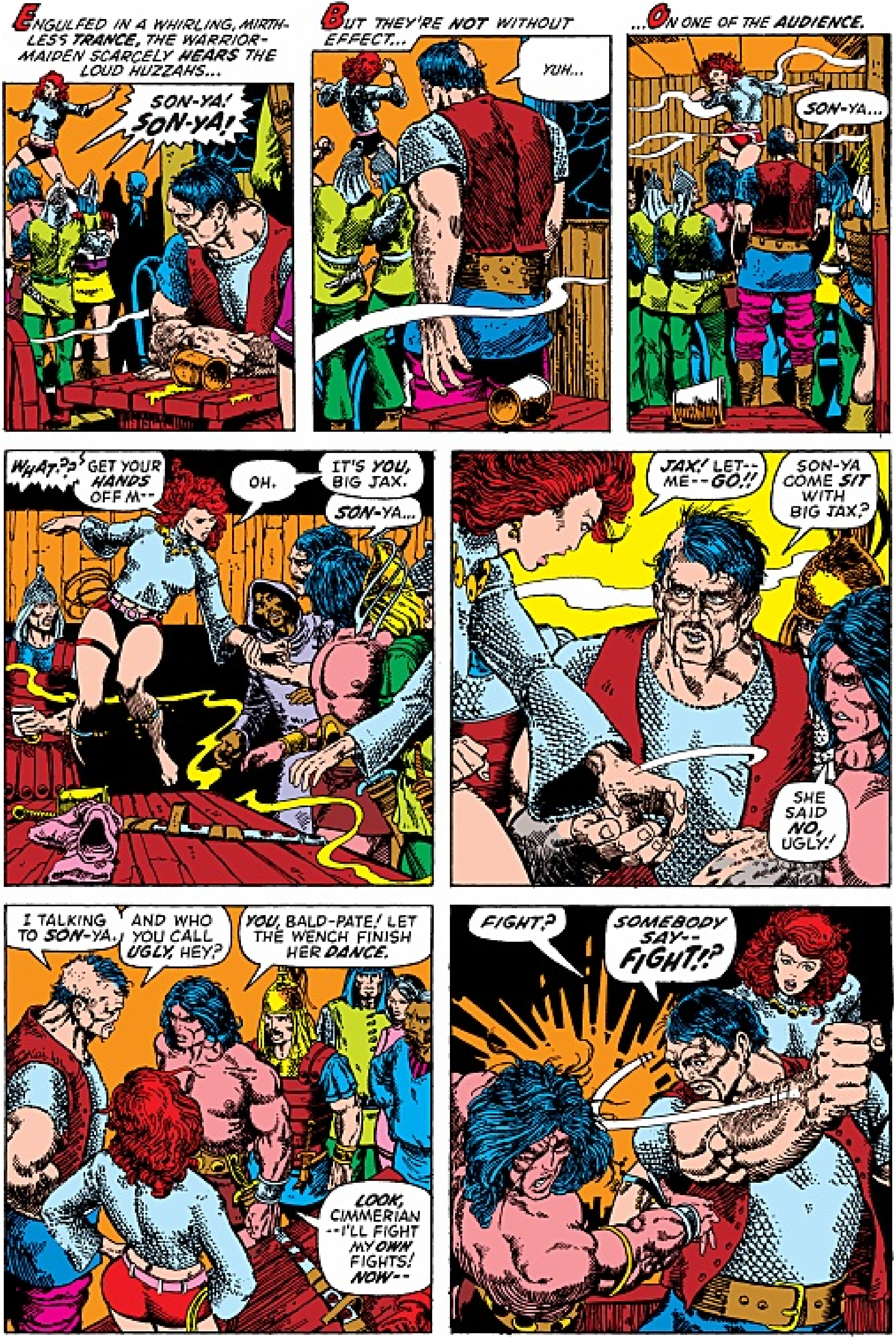
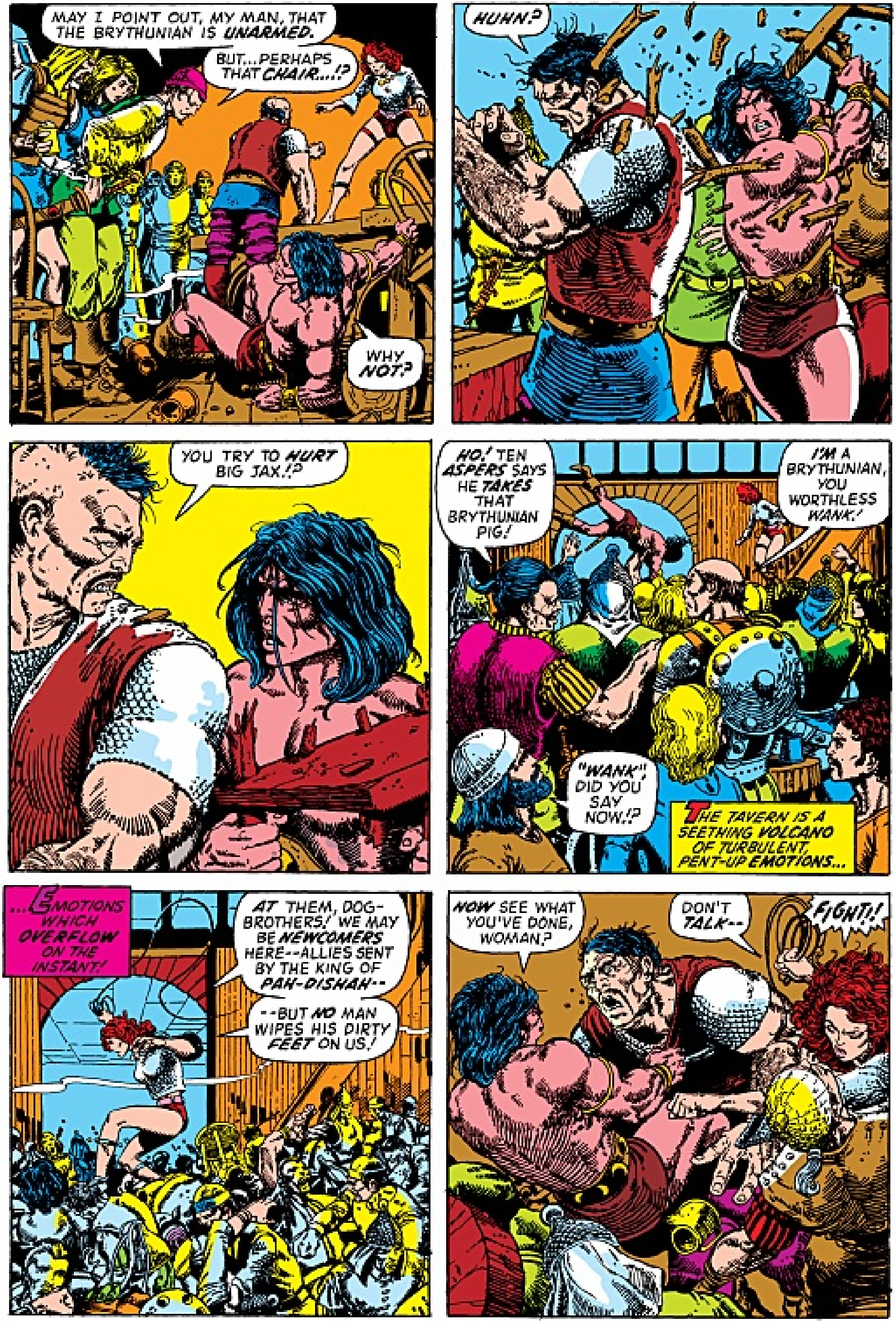
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN™
BARRY SMITH
THE SONG OF
RED SONJA

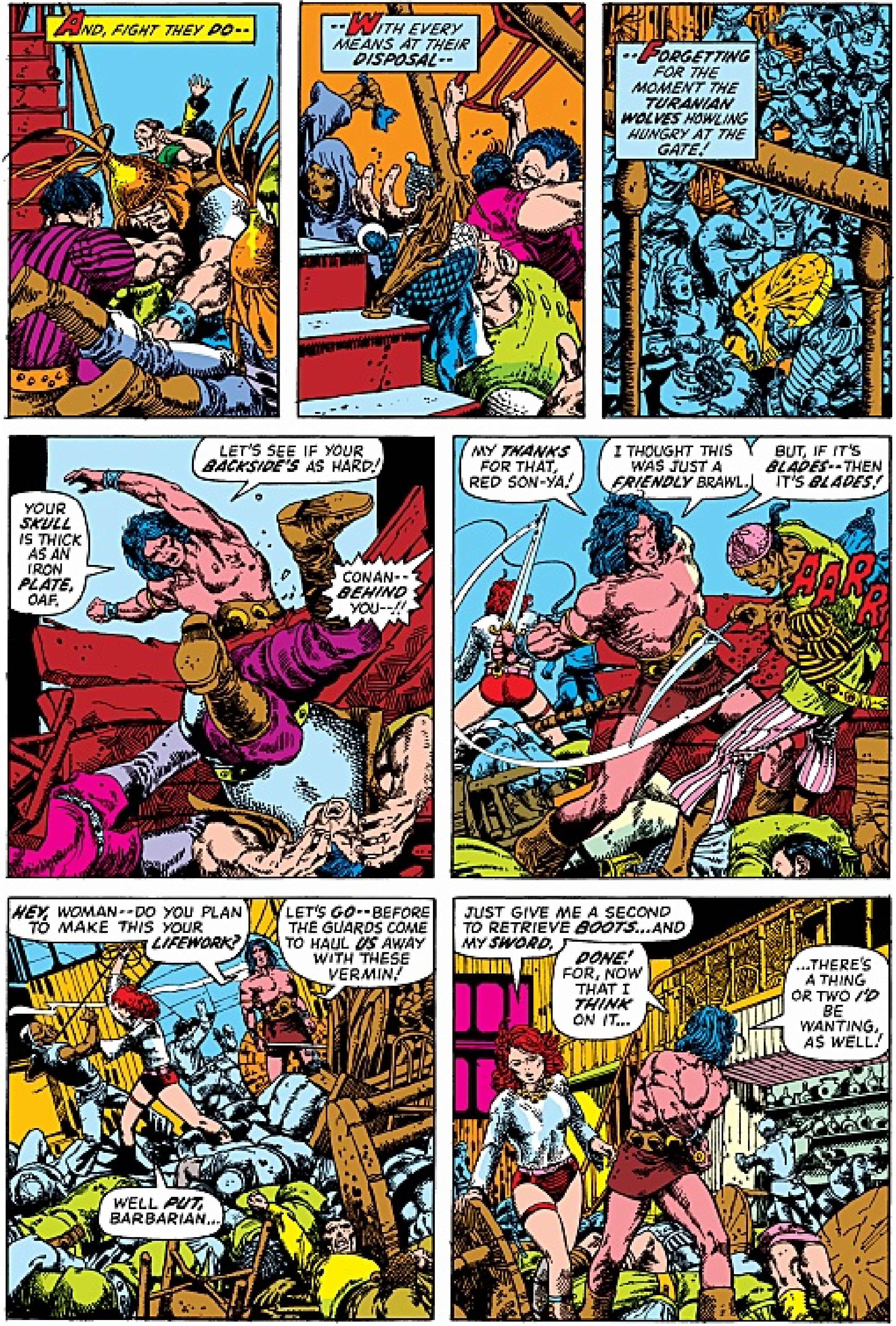
COVER ARTIST & COLORIST: BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

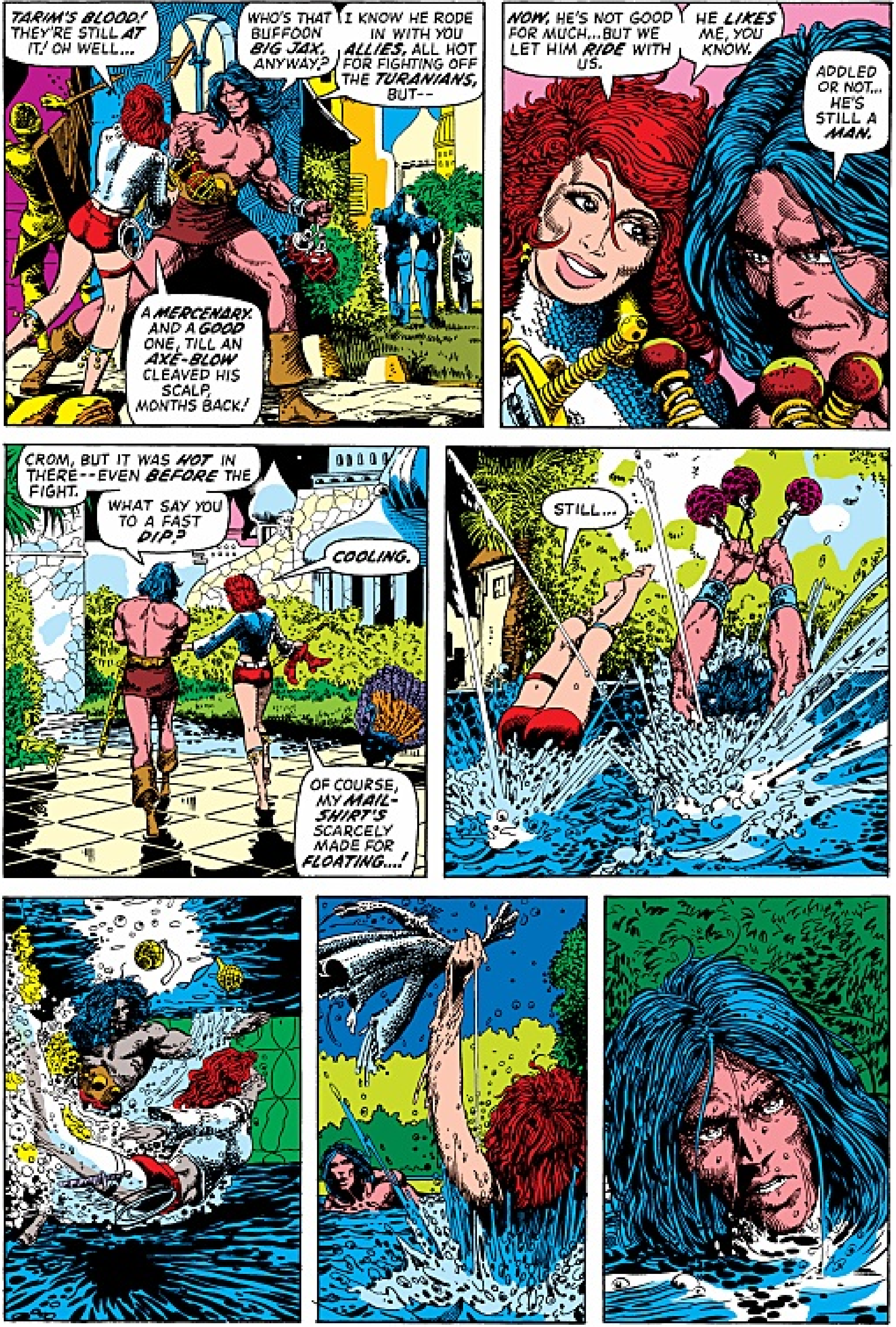

STAN LEE PRESENTS: CONAN THE BARBARIAN
THE SONG OF RED SONJA
All the world's a gore-rimmed sea,
Lo, the devil laughs with glee.
Come and dance then, you with me--
Come and caper wild and free!
With red blood those fires are lit;
Hades' smoke is tinged with it!
--R.E.H.
MAKKALET: A CITY SURROUNDED BY HOSTILE SWORDS OUT OF DISTANT TURAN.
BUT, IN THAT SECTOR OF THE CITY WHERE THE TAVERNS ARE THICKEST, THE SHOUTS THIS NIGHT ARE NOT OF WAR...!
SON-YA! SON-YA! SON-YA!!

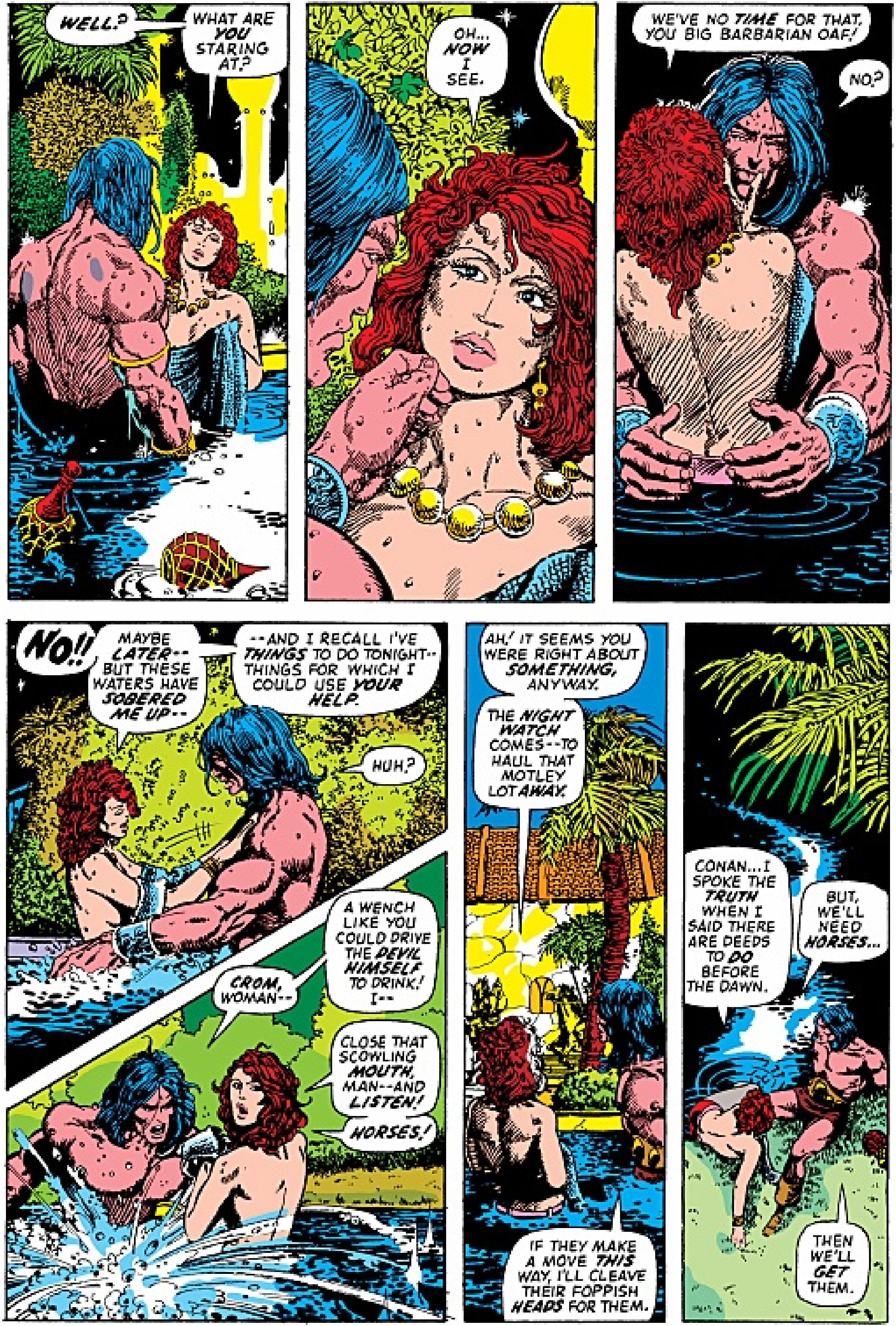
ROY THOMAS WRITER/EDITOR | **BARRY SMITH** ARTIST | **ARTIE SIMEK**, LETTERER **BARRY SMITH**, COLORIST | UTILIZING CHARACTERS CREATED AND POEMS WRITTEN BY **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

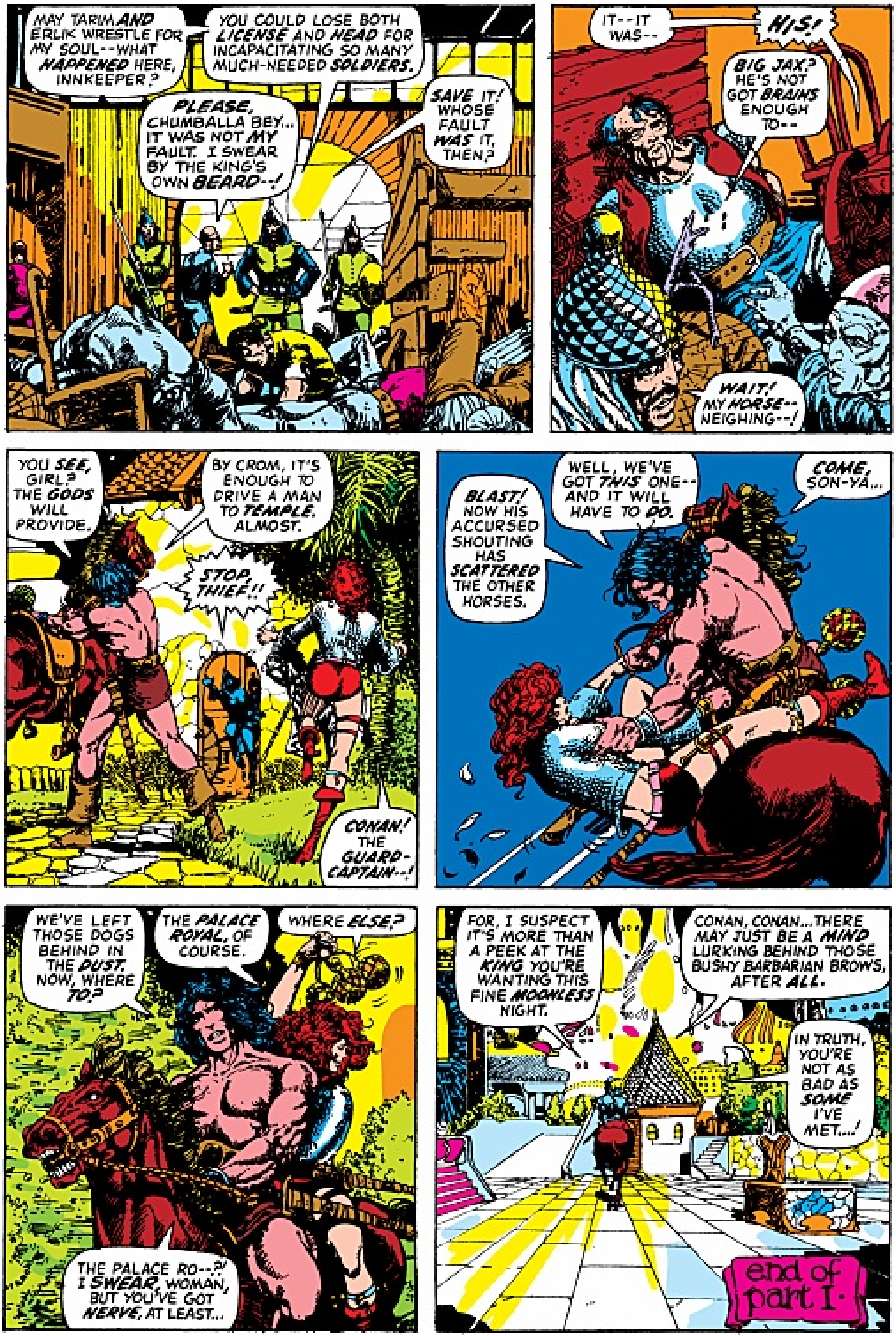

ENGULFED IN A WHIRLING, MIRTHLESS TRANCE, THE WARRIOR-MAIDEN SCARCELY HEARS THE LOUD HUZZAHS...
SON-YA! SON-YA!
BUT THEY'RE NOT WITHOUT EFFECT...
YUH...
...ON ONE OF THE AUDIENCE.
SON-YA...
WHAT?!?
GET YOUR HANDS OFF M--
OH.
IT'S YOU, BIG JAX.
SON-YA...
JAX! LET--ME--GO!!
SON-YA COME SIT WITH BIG JAX?
SHE SAID NO, UGLY!
I TALKING TO SON-YA.
AND WHO YOU CALL UGLY, HEY?
YOU, BALD-PATE! LET THE WENCH FINISH HER DANCE.
LOOK, CIMMERIAN--I'LL FIGHT MY OWN FIGHTS! NOW--
FIGHT?
SOMEBODY SAY--FIGHT!?

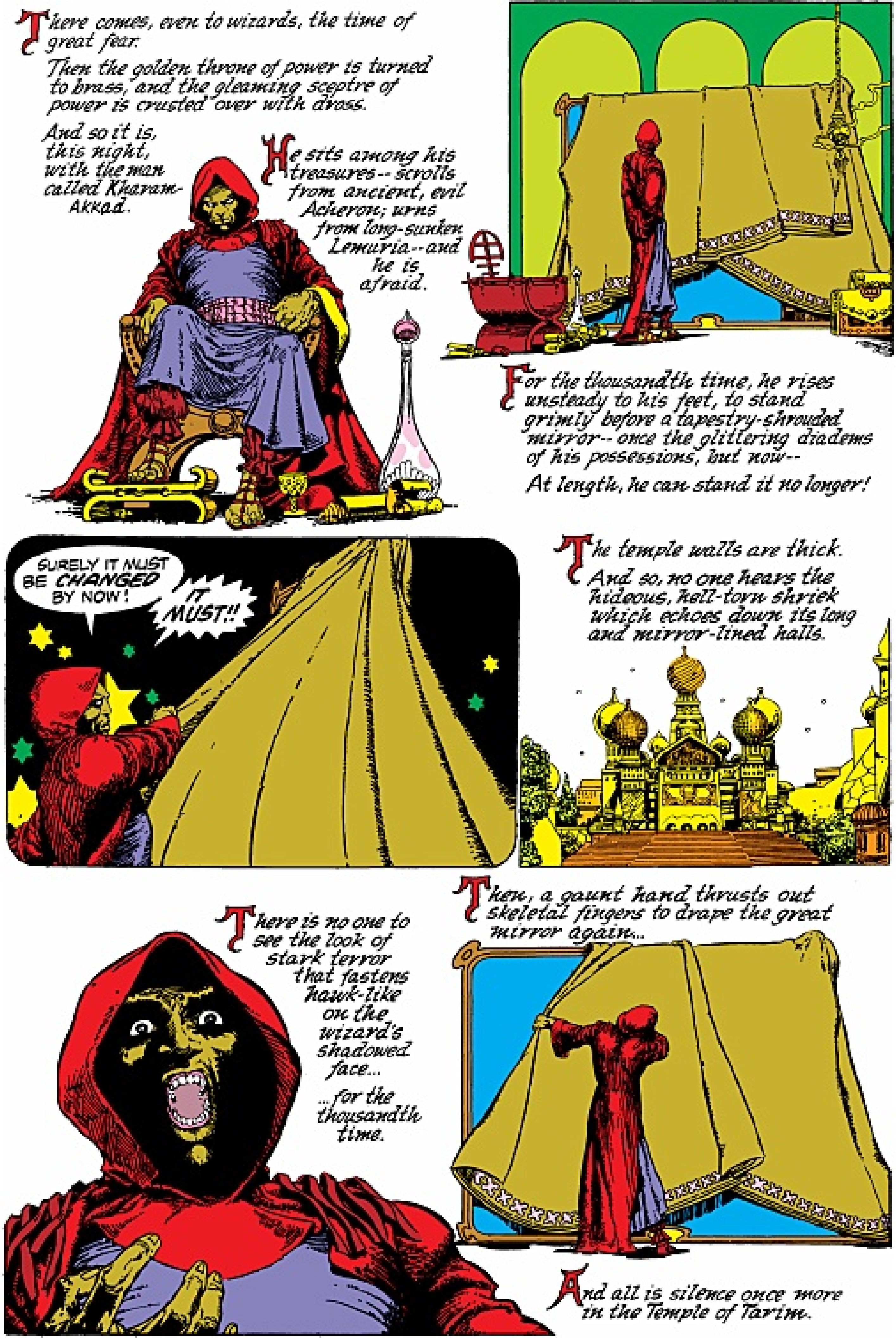

MAY I POINT OUT, MY MAN, THAT THE BRYTHUNIAN IS *UNARMED.*
BUT...PERHAPS THAT *CHAIR*...!?
WHY *NOT?*
HUHN?
YOU TRY TO *HURT* BIG JAX.!?
HO! TEN *ASPERS* SAYS HE *TAKES* THAT BRYTHUNIAN PIG!
I'M A BRYTHUNIAN, YOU WORTHLESS *WANK!*
"*WANK*", DID YOU SAY NOW.!?
THE TAVERN IS A SEETHING *VOLCANO* OF *TURBULENT,* PENT-UP *EMOTIONS...*
...EMOTIONS WHICH *OVERFLOW* ON THE *INSTANT!*
AT THEM, DOG-BROTHERS! WE MAY BE *NEWCOMERS* HERE--ALLIES SENT BY THE KING OF *PAH-DISHAH*--
--BUT *NO* MAN WIPES HIS DIRTY *FEET* ON US!
NOW SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE, WOMAN?
DON'T *TALK*--
FIGHT!!

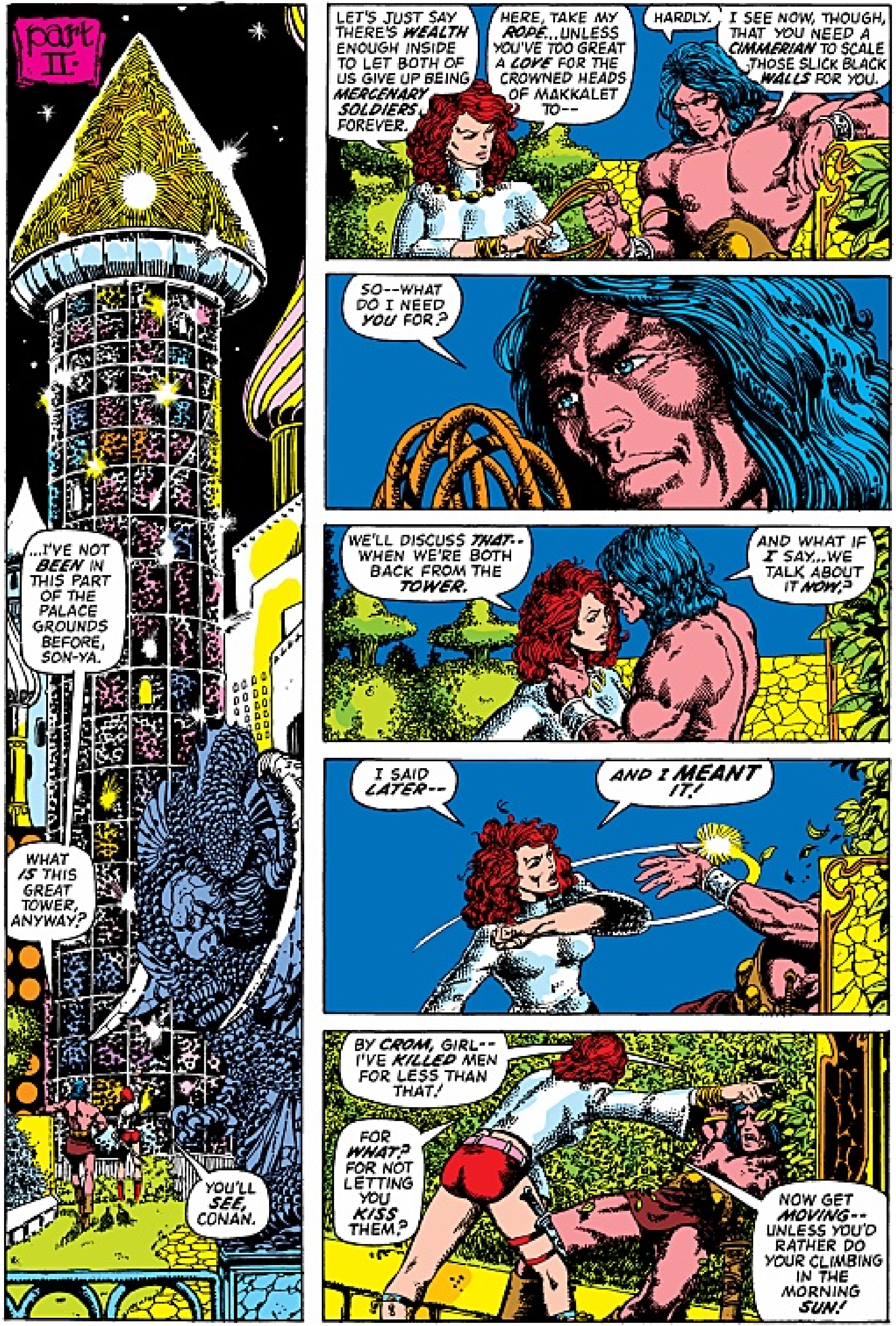

AND, FIGHT THEY DO--
--WITH EVERY MEANS AT THEIR DISPOSAL--
--FORGETTING FOR THE MOMENT THE TURANIAN WOLVES HOWLING HUNGRY AT THE GATE!
LET'S SEE IF YOUR BACKSIDE'S AS HARD!
YOUR SKULL IS THICK AS AN IRON PLATE, OAF.
CONAN--BEHIND YOU--!!
MY THANKS FOR THAT, RED SON-YA!
I THOUGHT THIS WAS JUST A FRIENDLY BRAWL.
BUT, IF IT'S BLADES--THEN IT'S BLADES!
AARR
HEY, WOMAN--DO YOU PLAN TO MAKE THIS YOUR LIFEWORK?
LET'S GO--BEFORE THE GUARDS COME TO HAUL US AWAY WITH THESE VERMIN!
WELL PUT, BARBARIAN...
JUST GIVE ME A SECOND TO RETRIEVE BOOTS...AND MY SWORD.
DONE! FOR, NOW THAT I THINK ON IT...
...THERE'S A THING OR TWO I'D BE WANTING, AS WELL!

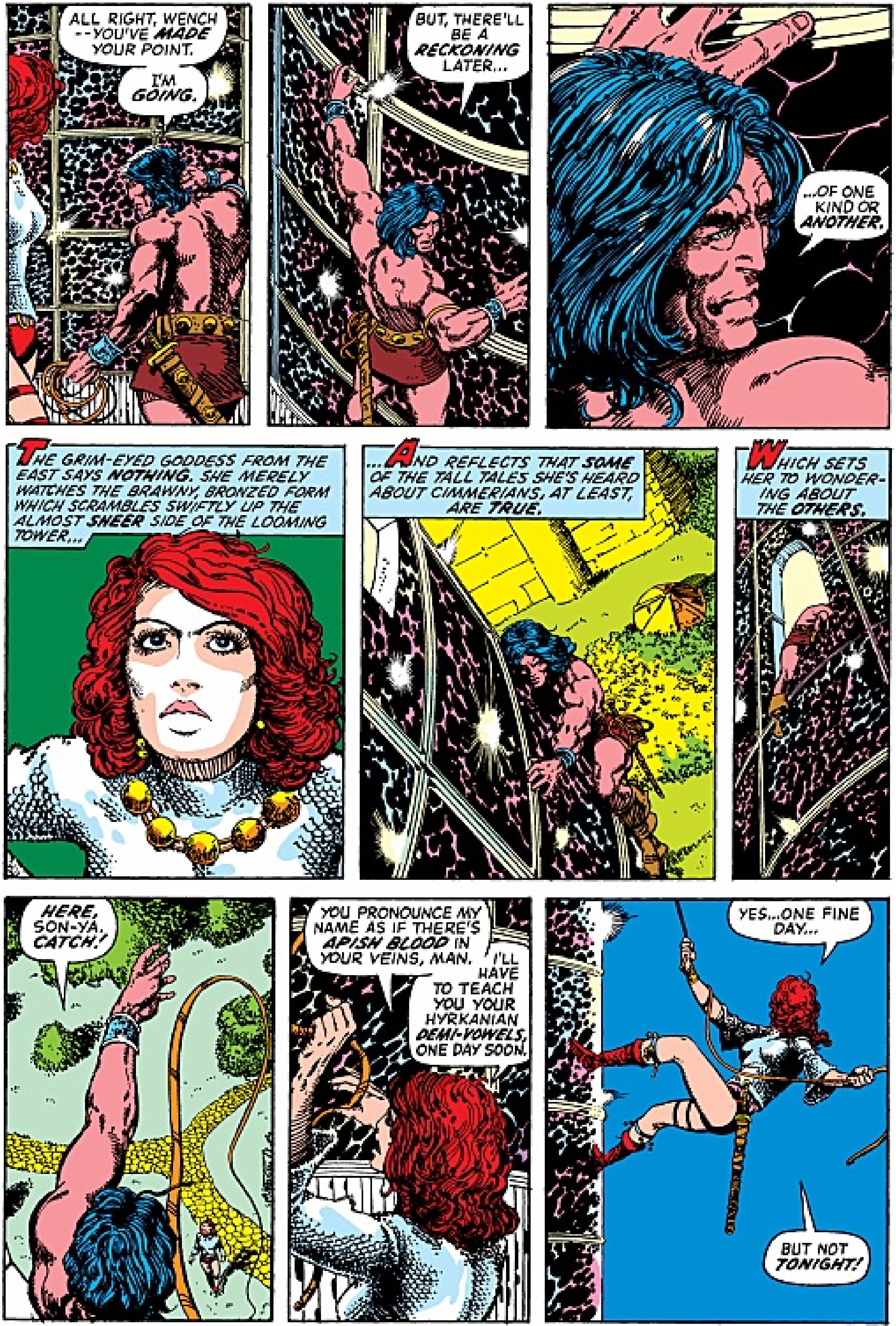

TARIM'S BLOOD! THEY'RE STILL AT IT! OH WELL...
WHO'S THAT BUFFOON BIG JAX, ANYWAY?
I KNOW HE RODE IN WITH YOU ALLIES, ALL HOT FOR FIGHTING OFF THE TURANIANS, BUT--
A MERCENARY. AND A GOOD ONE, TILL AN AXE-BLOW CLEAVED HIS SCALP, MONTHS BACK!
NOW, HE'S NOT GOOD FOR MUCH...BUT WE LET HIM RIDE WITH US.
HE LIKES ME, YOU KNOW.
ADDLED OR NOT... HE'S STILL A MAN.
CROM, BUT IT WAS HOT IN THERE--EVEN BEFORE THE FIGHT.
WHAT SAY YOU TO A FAST DIP?
COOLING.
OF COURSE, MY MAIL-SHIRT'S SCARCELY MADE FOR FLOATING...!
STILL...

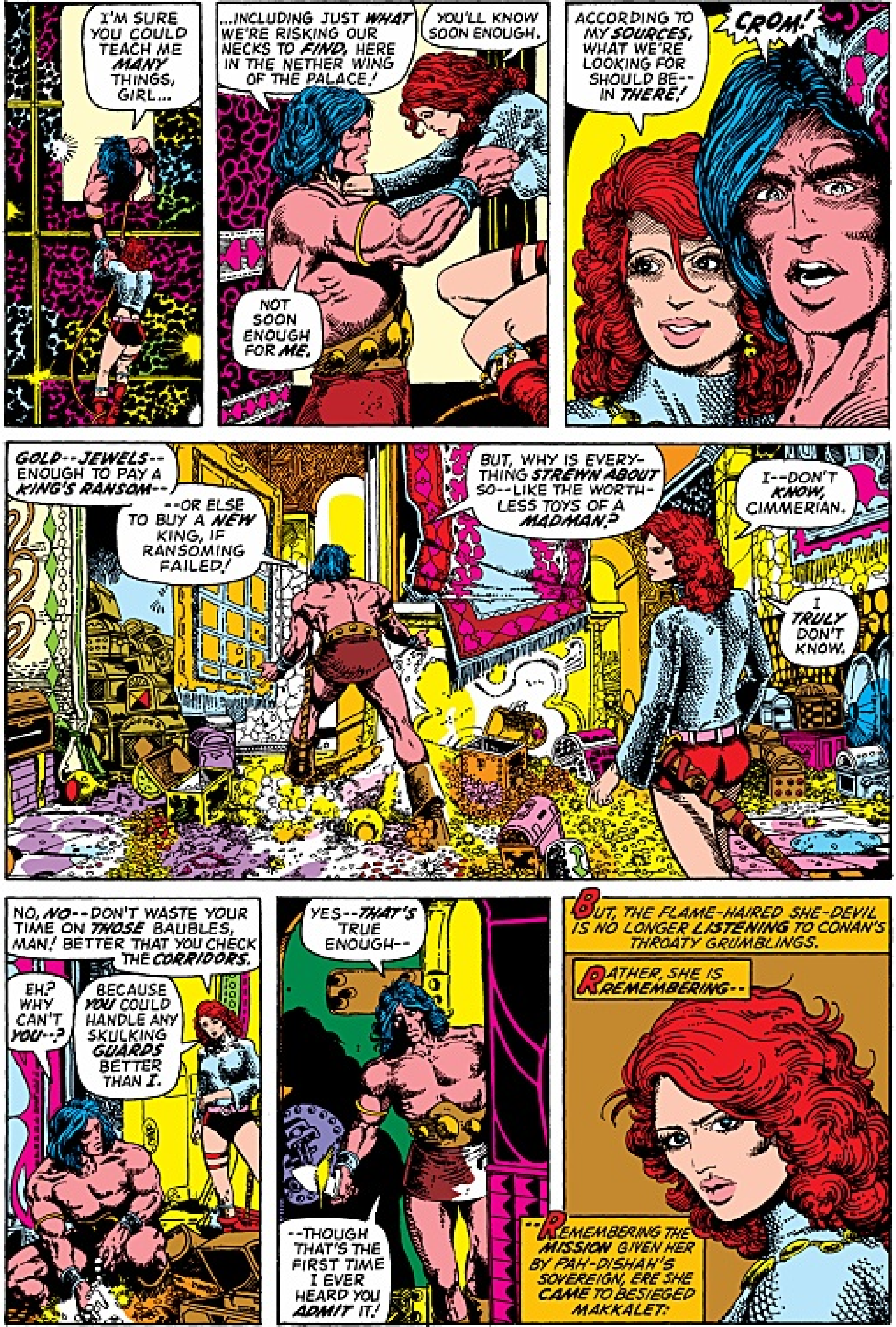

WELL?
WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT?
OH... NOW I SEE.
WE'VE NO TIME FOR THAT, YOU BIG BARBARIAN OAF!
NO?
NO!!
MAYBE LATER-- BUT THESE WATERS HAVE SOBERED ME UP--
--AND I RECALL I'VE THINGS TO DO TONIGHT-- THINGS FOR WHICH I COULD USE YOUR HELP.
HUH?
CROM, WOMAN--
A WENCH LIKE YOU COULD DRIVE THE DEVIL HIMSELF TO DRINK! I--
CLOSE THAT SCOWLING MOUTH, MAN--AND LISTEN!
HORSES!
AH! IT SEEMS YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT SOMETHING, ANYWAY.
THE NIGHT WATCH COMES--TO HAUL THAT MOTLEY LOT AWAY.
IF THEY MAKE A MOVE THIS WAY, I'LL CLEAVE THEIR FOPPISH HEADS FOR THEM.
CONAN...I SPOKE THE TRUTH WHEN I SAID THERE ARE DEEDS TO DO BEFORE THE DAWN.
BUT, WE'LL NEED HORSES...
THEN WE'LL GET THEM.

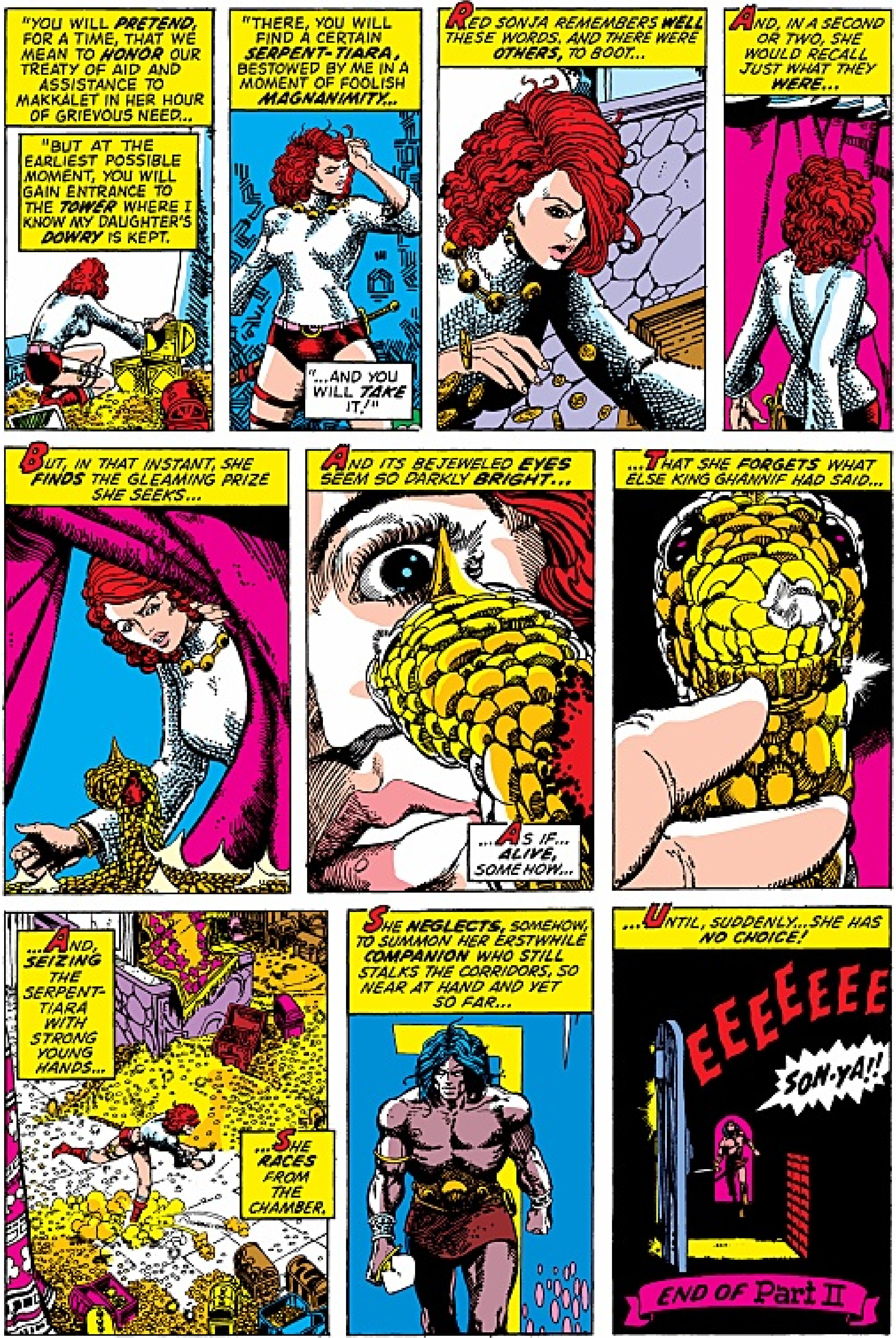

MAY TARIM AND ERLIK WRESTLE FOR MY SOUL--WHAT HAPPENED HERE, INNKEEPER?
YOU COULD LOSE BOTH LICENSE AND HEAD FOR INCAPACITATING SO MANY MUCH-NEEDED SOLDIERS.
PLEASE, CHUMBALLA BEY... IT WAS NOT MY FAULT. I SWEAR BY THE KING'S OWN BEARD--!
SAVE IT! WHOSE FAULT WAS IT, THEN?
IT--IT WAS--
HIS!
BIG JAX? HE'S NOT GOT BRAINS ENOUGH TO--
WAIT! MY HORSE--NEIGHING--!
YOU SEE, GIRL? THE GODS WILL PROVIDE.
BY CROM, IT'S ENOUGH TO DRIVE A MAN TO TEMPLE. ALMOST.
STOP, THIEF!!
CONAN! THE GUARD-CAPTAIN--!
BLAST! NOW HIS ACCURSED SHOUTING HAS SCATTERED THE OTHER HORSES.
WELL, WE'VE GOT THIS ONE--AND IT WILL HAVE TO DO.
COME, SON-YA...
WE'VE LEFT THOSE DOGS BEHIND IN THE DUST. NOW, WHERE TO?
THE PALACE ROYAL, OF COURSE.
WHERE ELSE?
THE PALACE RO--?! I SWEAR, WOMAN, BUT YOU'VE GOT NERVE, AT LEAST...
FOR, I SUSPECT IT'S MORE THAN A PEEK AT THE KING YOU'RE WANTING THIS FINE MOONLESS NIGHT.
CONAN, CONAN... THERE MAY JUST BE A MIND LURKING BEHIND THOSE BUSHY BARBARIAN BROWS, AFTER ALL.
IN TRUTH, YOU'RE NOT AS BAD AS SOME I'VE MET...!
end of part I.


There comes, even to wizards, the time of great fear.
Then the golden throne of power is turned to brass, and the gleaming sceptre of power is crusted over with dross.
And so it is, this night, with the man called Kharam-Akkad.
He sits among his treasures -- scrolls from ancient, evil Acheron; urns from long-sunken Lemuria -- and he is afraid.
For the thousandth time, he rises unsteady to his feet, to stand grimly before a tapestry-shrouded mirror -- once the glittering diadems of his possessions, but now --
At length, he can stand it no longer!
SURELY IT MUST BE CHANGED BY NOW!
IT MUST!!
The temple walls are thick.
And so, no one hears the hideous, hell-torn shriek which echoes down its long and mirror-lined halls.
There is no one to see the look of stark terror that fastens hawk-like on the wizard's shadowed face...
...for the thousandth time.
Then, a gaunt hand thrusts out skeletal fingers to drape the great mirror again...
And all is silence once more in the Temple of Tarim.


part II
...I'VE NOT BEEN IN THIS PART OF THE PALACE GROUNDS BEFORE, SON-YA.
WHAT IS THIS GREAT TOWER, ANYWAY?
YOU'LL SEE, CONAN.
LET'S JUST SAY THERE'S WEALTH ENOUGH INSIDE TO LET BOTH OF US GIVE UP BEING MERCENARY SOLDIERS FOREVER.
HERE, TAKE MY ROPE...UNLESS YOU'VE TOO GREAT A LOVE FOR THE CROWNED HEADS OF MAKKALET TO--
HARDLY.
I SEE NOW, THOUGH, THAT YOU NEED A CIMMERIAN TO SCALE THOSE SLICK BLACK WALLS FOR YOU.
SO--WHAT DO I NEED YOU FOR?
WE'LL DISCUSS THAT--WHEN WE'RE BOTH BACK FROM THE TOWER.
AND WHAT IF I SAY...WE TALK ABOUT IT NOW?
I SAID LATER--
AND I MEANT IT!
BY CROM, GIRL--I'VE KILLED MEN FOR LESS THAN THAT!
FOR WHAT? FOR NOT LETTING YOU KISS THEM?
NOW GET MOVING--UNLESS YOU'D RATHER DO YOUR CLIMBING IN THE MORNING SUN!

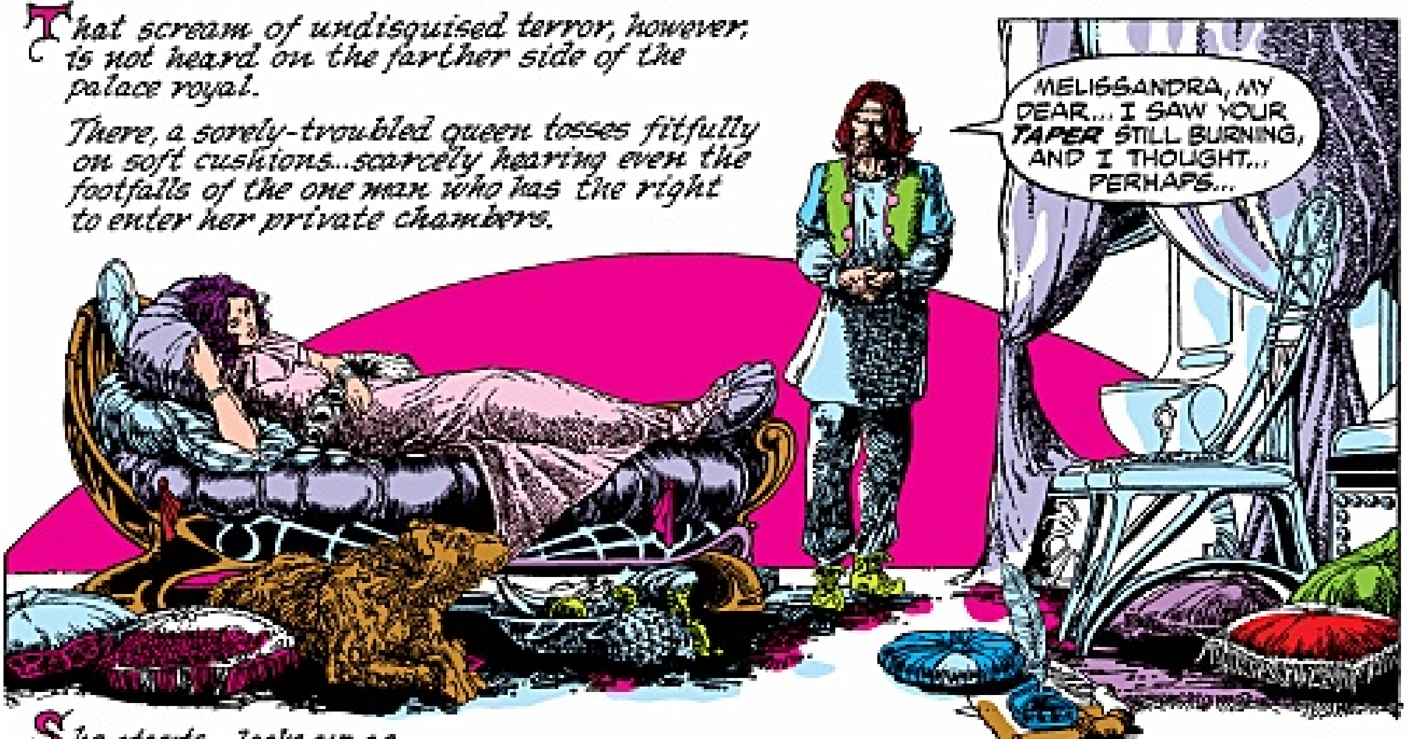

ALL RIGHT, WENCH --YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT.
I'M GOING.
BUT, THERE'LL BE A RECKONING LATER...
...OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER.
THE GRIM-EYED GODDESS FROM THE EAST SAYS NOTHING. SHE MERELY WATCHES THE BRAWNY, BRONZED FORM WHICH SCRAMBLES SWIFTLY UP THE ALMOST SHEER SIDE OF THE LOOMING TOWER...
...AND REFLECTS THAT SOME OF THE TALL TALES SHE'S HEARD ABOUT CIMMERIANS, AT LEAST, ARE TRUE.
WHICH SETS HER TO WONDERING ABOUT THE OTHERS.
HERE, SON-YA. CATCH!
YOU PRONOUNCE MY NAME AS IF THERE'S APISH BLOOD IN YOUR VEINS, MAN.
I'LL HAVE TO TEACH YOU YOUR HYRKANIAN DEMI-VOWELS, ONE DAY SOON.
YES...ONE FINE DAY...
BUT NOT TONIGHT!


I'M SURE YOU COULD TEACH ME *MANY* THINGS, GIRL...
...INCLUDING JUST *WHAT* WE'RE RISKING OUR NECKS TO *FIND*, HERE IN THE NETHER WING OF THE PALACE!
YOU'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH.
NOT SOON ENOUGH FOR *ME*.
ACCORDING TO MY *SOURCES*, WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR SHOULD BE-- IN *THERE!*
CROM!
GOLD--JEWELS-- ENOUGH TO PAY A *KING'S RANSOM--*
--OR ELSE TO BUY A *NEW* KING, IF RANSOMING FAILED!
BUT, WHY IS EVERYTHING *STREWN ABOUT* SO--LIKE THE WORTHLESS TOYS OF A *MADMAN?*
I--DON'T *KNOW*, CIMMERIAN.
I *TRULY* DON'T KNOW.
NO, *NO*--DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME ON *THOSE* BAUBLES, MAN! BETTER THAT YOU CHECK THE *CORRIDORS*.
EH? WHY CAN'T *YOU*--?
BECAUSE *YOU* COULD HANDLE ANY SKULKING *GUARDS* BETTER THAN *I*.
YES--*THAT'S* TRUE ENOUGH--
--THOUGH THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I EVER HEARD YOU *ADMIT* IT!
BUT, THE FLAME-HAIRED SHE-DEVIL IS NO LONGER *LISTENING* TO CONAN'S THROATY GRUMBLINGS.
RATHER, SHE IS *REMEMBERING--*
--REMEMBERING THE *MISSION* GIVEN HER BY PAH-DISHAH'S SOVEREIGN, ERE SHE *CAME* TO BESIEGED MAKKALET:

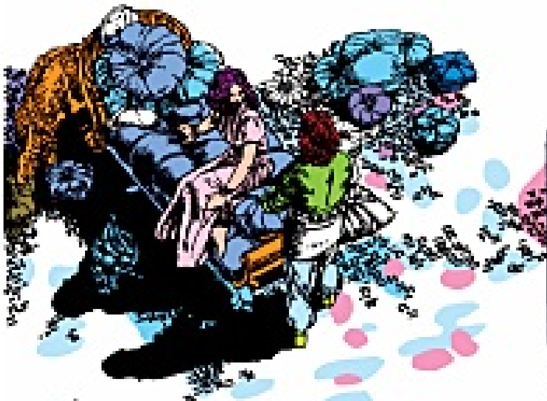

"YOU WILL PRETEND, FOR A TIME, THAT WE MEAN TO HONOR OUR TREATY OF AID AND ASSISTANCE TO MAKKALET IN HER HOUR OF GRIEVOUS NEED...
"BUT AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT, YOU WILL GAIN ENTRANCE TO THE TOWER WHERE I KNOW MY DAUGHTER'S DOWRY IS KEPT.
"THERE, YOU WILL FIND A CERTAIN SERPENT-TIARA, BESTOWED BY ME IN A MOMENT OF FOOLISH MAGNANIMITY...
"...AND YOU WILL TAKE IT!"
RED SONJA REMEMBERS WELL THESE WORDS, AND THERE WERE OTHERS, TO BOOT...
AND, IN A SECOND OR TWO, SHE WOULD RECALL JUST WHAT THEY WERE...
BUT, IN THAT INSTANT, SHE FINDS THE GLEAMING PRIZE SHE SEEKS...
AND ITS BEJEWELED EYES SEEM SO DARKLY BRIGHT...
...AS IF... ALIVE, SOME HOW...
...THAT SHE FORGETS WHAT ELSE KING GHANNIF HAD SAID...
...AND, SEIZING THE SERPENT-TIARA WITH STRONG YOUNG HANDS...
...SHE RACES FROM THE CHAMBER.
SHE NEGLECTS, SOMEHOW, TO SUMMON HER ERSTWHILE COMPANION WHO STILL STALKS THE CORRIDORS, SO NEAR AT HAND AND YET SO FAR...
...UNTIL, SUDDENLY...SHE HAS NO CHOICE!
EEEEEEE
SON-YA!!
END OF Part II

That scream of undisguised terror, however, is not heard on the farther side of the palace royal.

There, a sorely-troubled queen tosses fitfully on soft cushions...scarcely hearing even the footfalls of the one man who has the right to enter her private chambers.

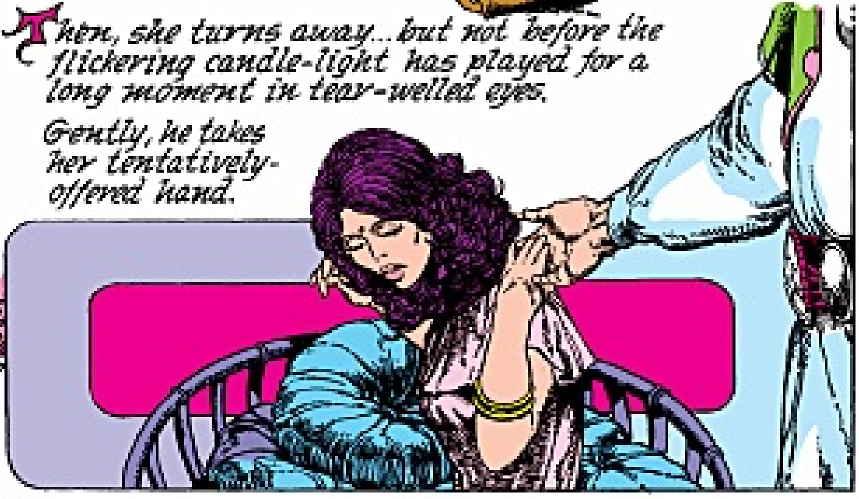

MELISSANDRA, MY DEAR... I SAW YOUR TAPER STILL BURNING, AND I THOUGHT... PERHAPS...

She starts--looks up as though she had expected to see--
...someone else.

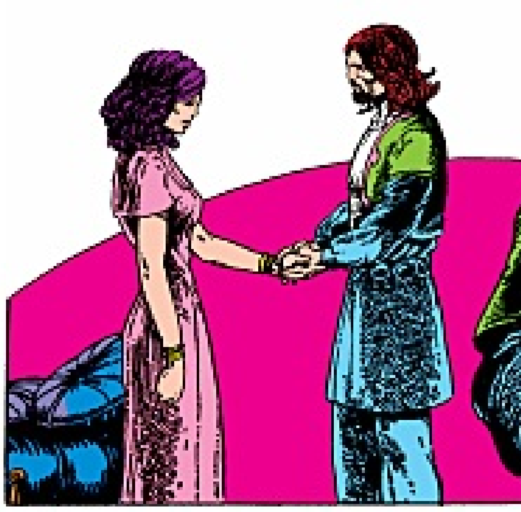


Then, she turns away...but not before the flickering candle-light has played for a long moment in tear-welled eyes.

Gently, he takes her tentatively-offered hand.

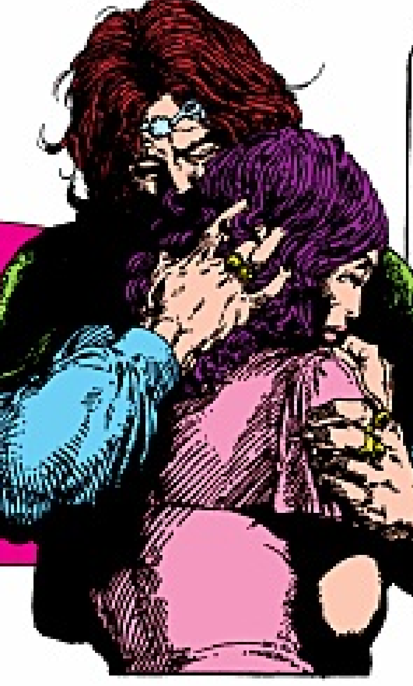


She rises. For an eternity, they stand gazing at each other, groping for the words that have always come so hard to a very young queen and a husband twice her age.

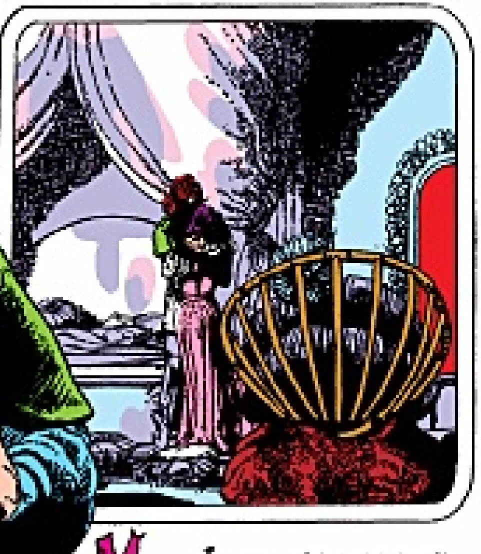


At last, they realize that there are no words left to say...

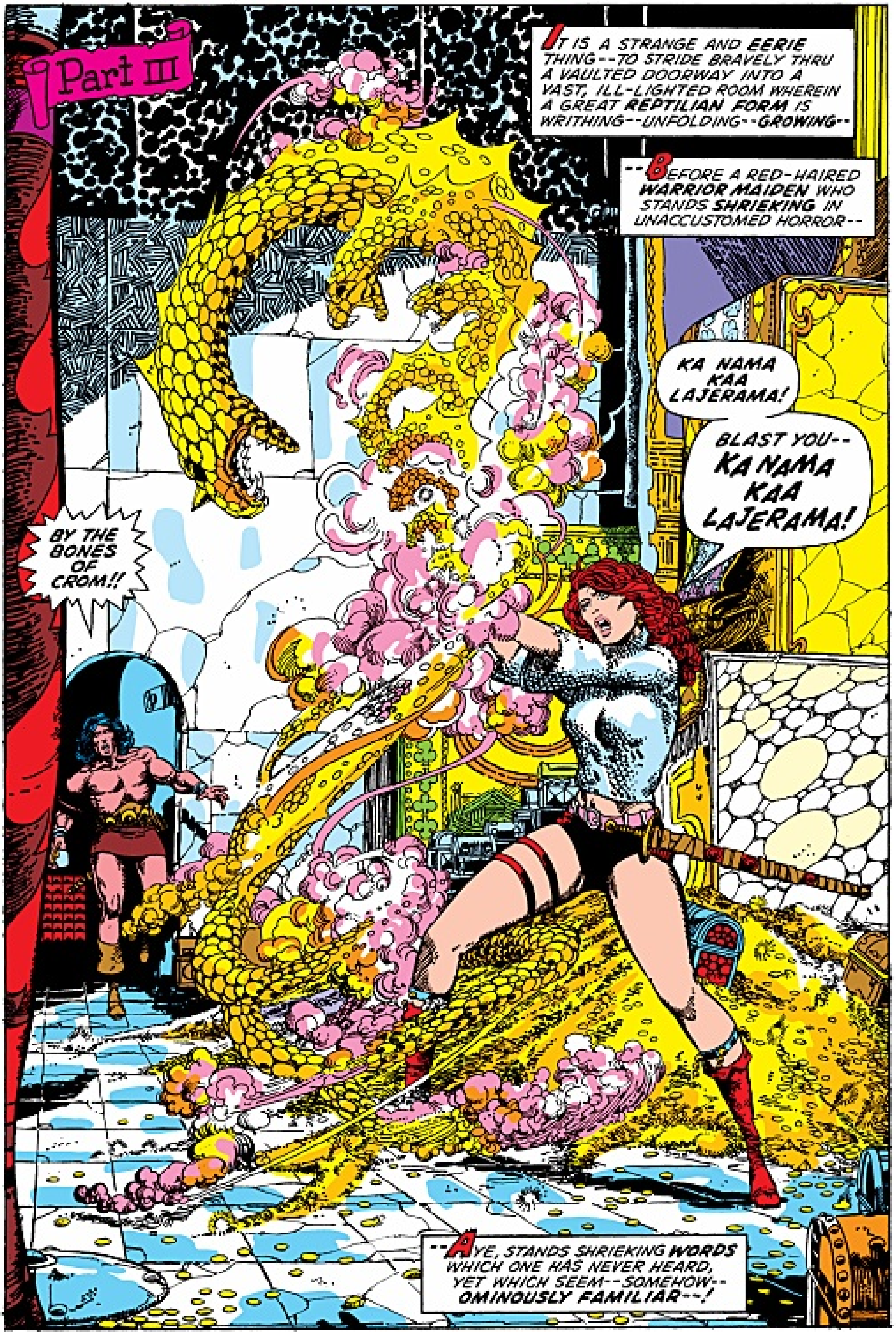
So they simply hold each other close...no passion in the embrace, but only a tender caring...

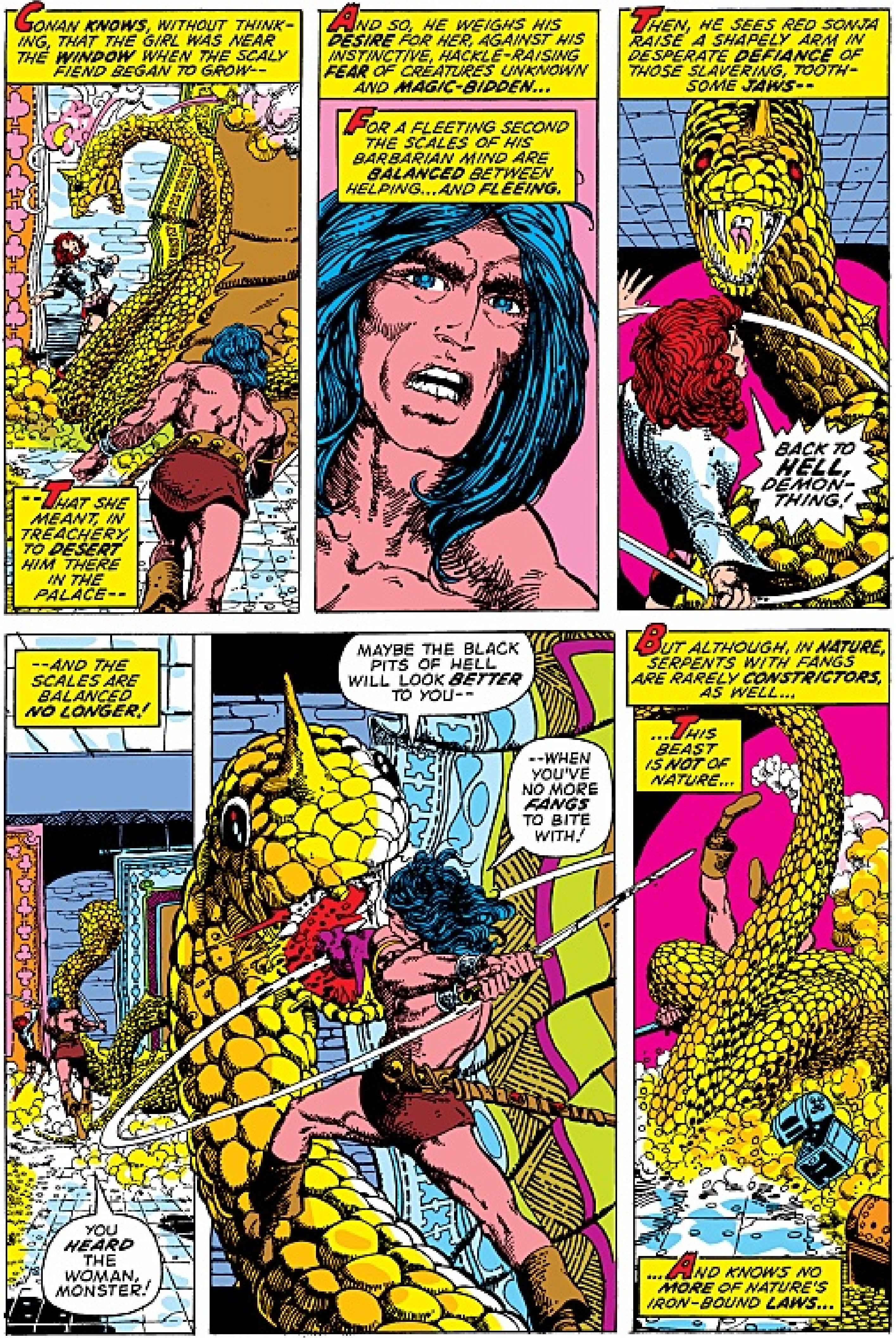


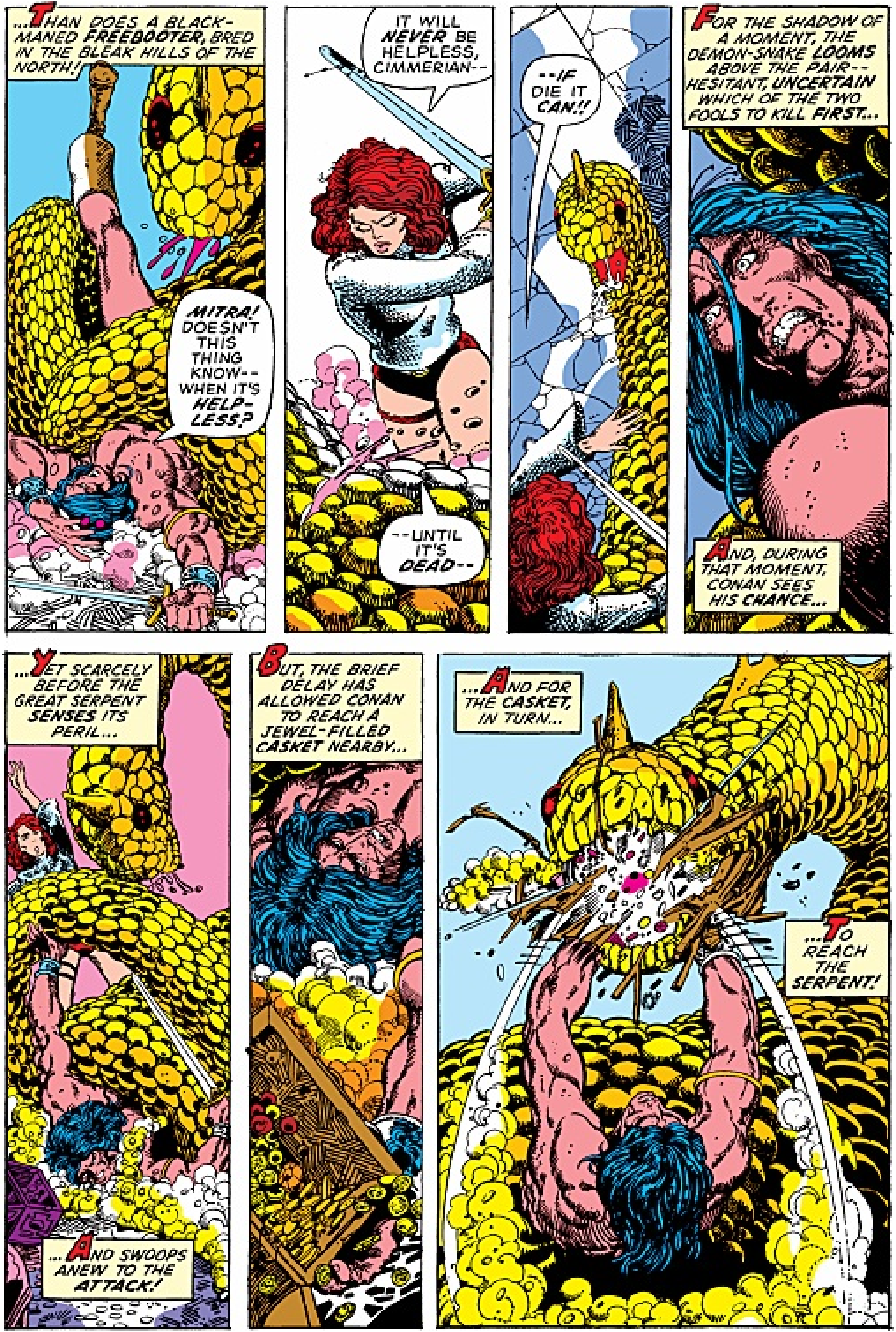
And, for an instant, there is no Turanian horde battering at the high serpent-wall of Makkalet...no holy war on which great empires must rise and fall...

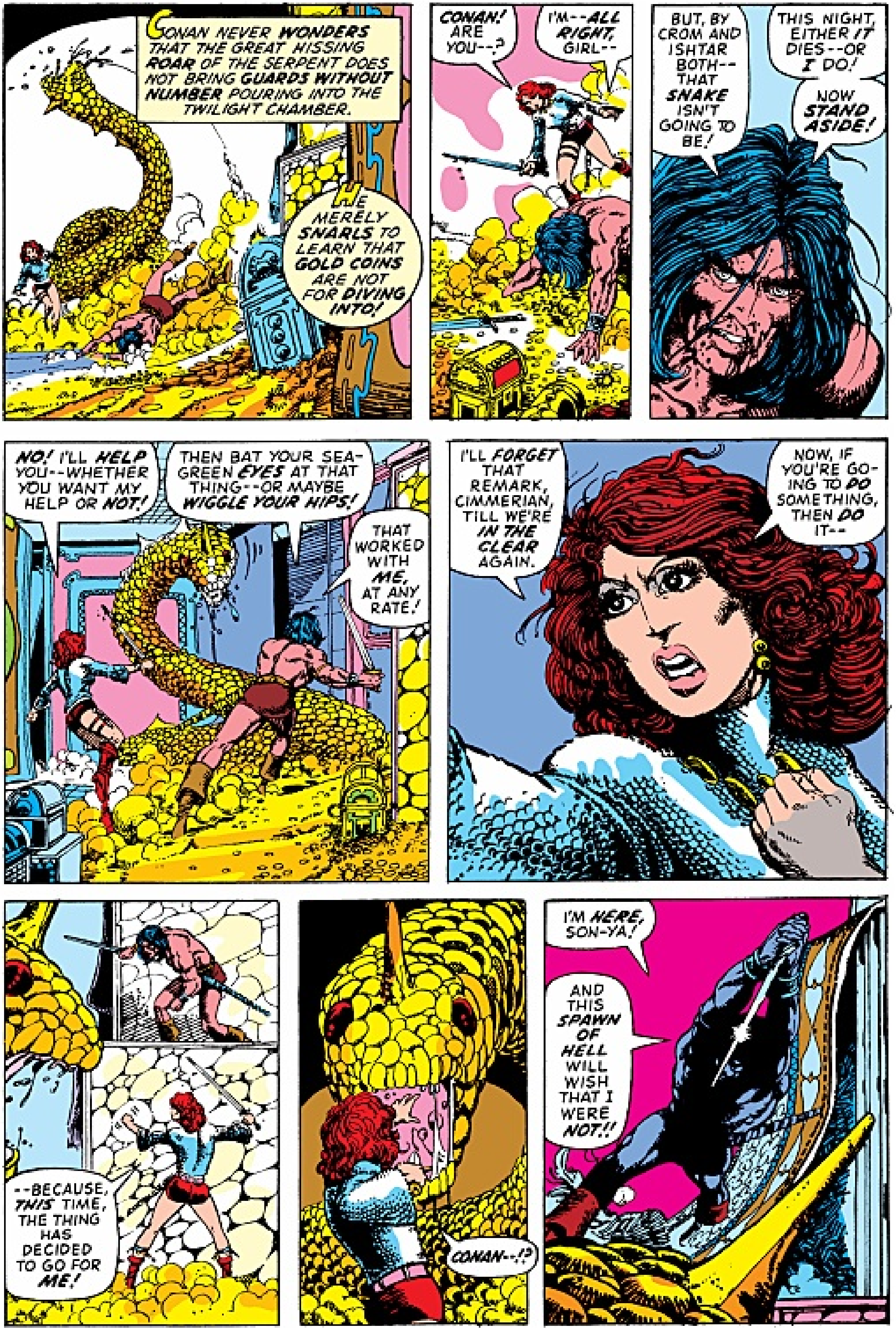


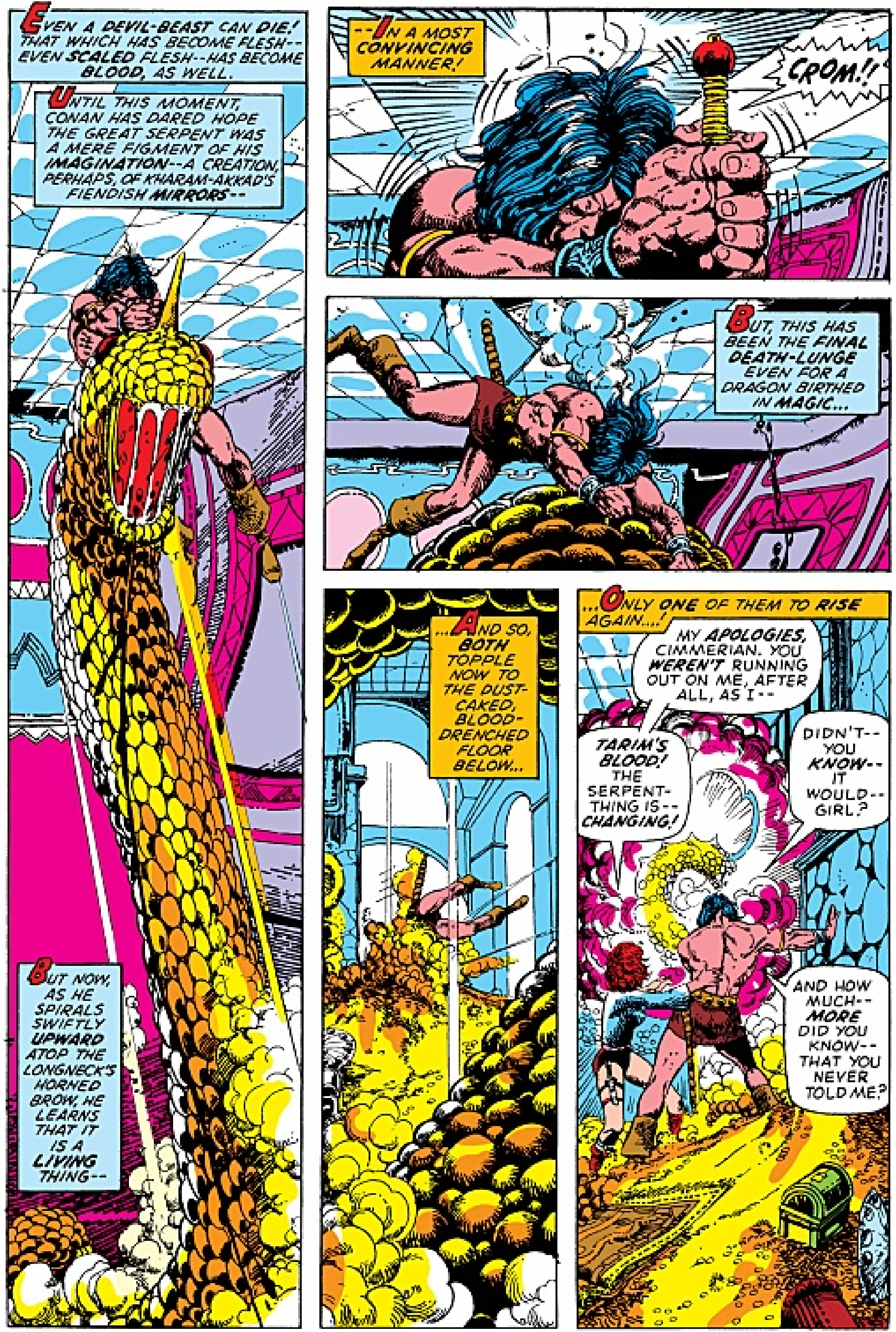
Merely a man, grown suddenly older...and a woman, who never was a little girl.

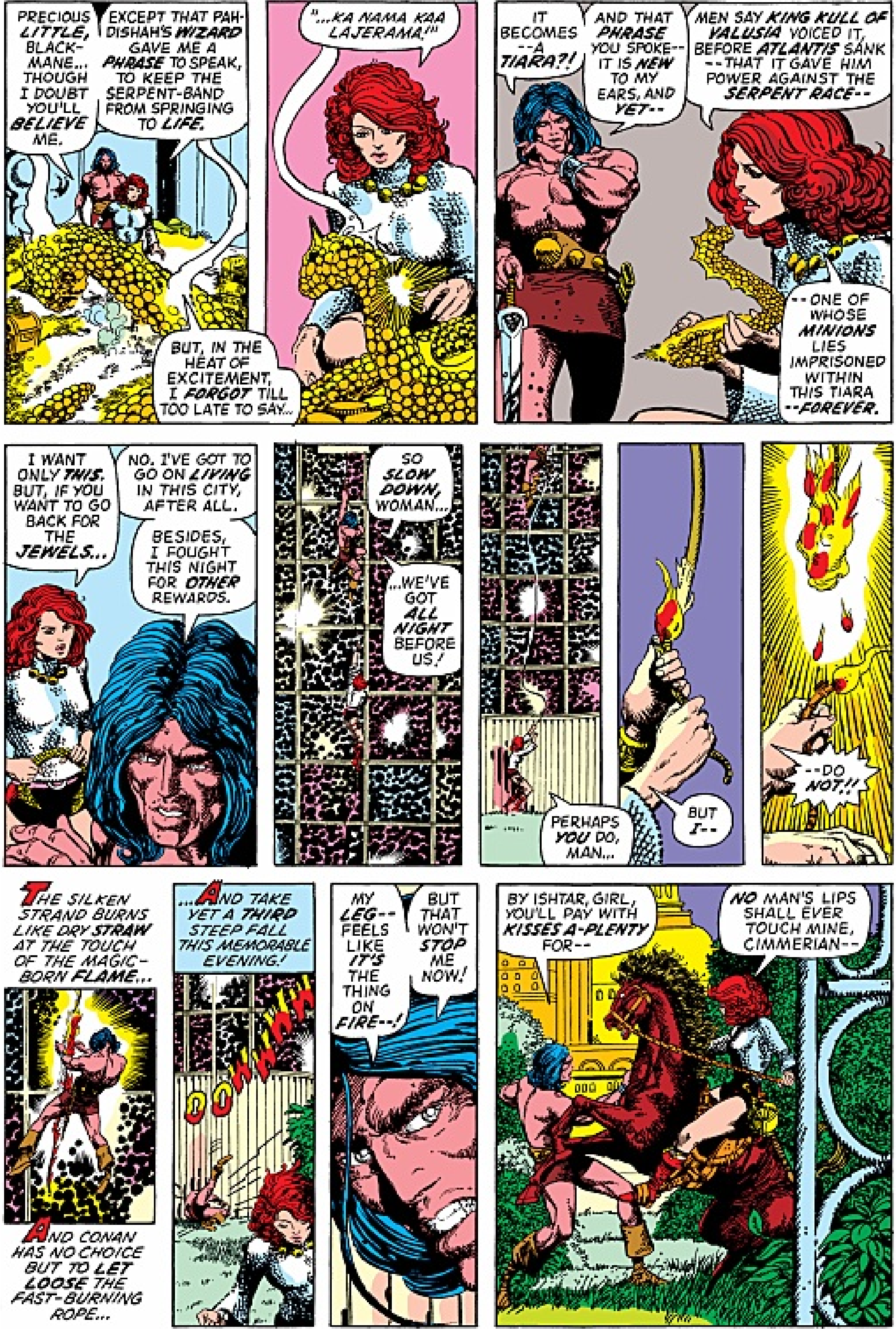

Part III
IT IS A STRANGE AND EERIE THING--TO STRIDE BRAVELY THRU A VAULTED DOORWAY INTO A VAST, ILL-LIGHTED ROOM WHEREIN A GREAT REPTILIAN FORM IS WRITHING--UNFOLDING--GROWING--
--BEFORE A RED-HAIRED WARRIOR MAIDEN WHO STANDS SHRIEKING IN UNACCUSTOMED HORROR--
KA NAMA KAA LAJERAMA!
BLAST YOU--KA NAMA KAA LAJERAMA!
BY THE BONES OF CROM!!
--AYE, STANDS SHRIEKING WORDS WHICH ONE HAS NEVER HEARD, YET WHICH SEEM--SOMEHOW--OMINOUSLY FAMILIAR--!

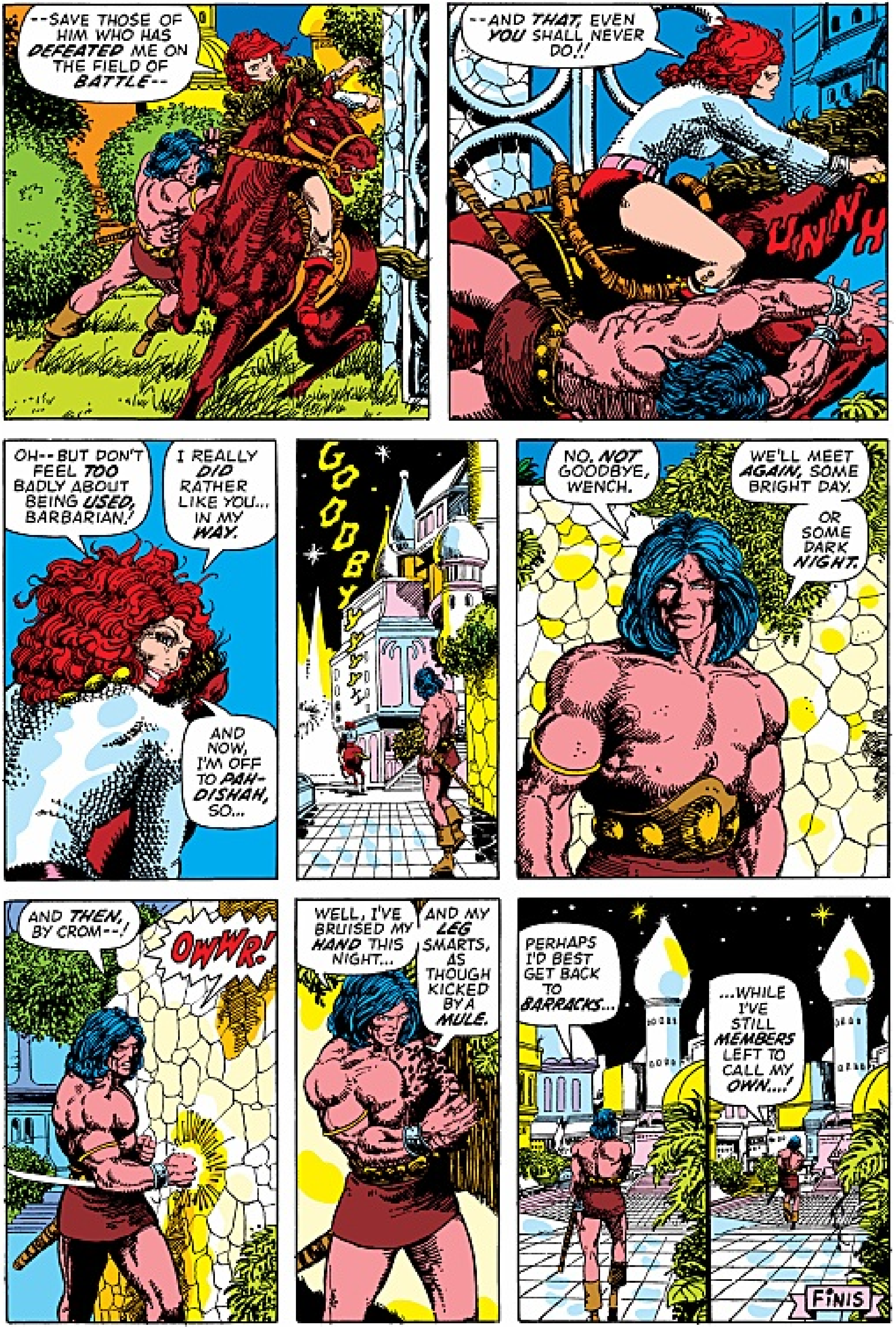

CONAN **KNOWS**, WITHOUT THINKING, THAT THE GIRL WAS NEAR THE **WINDOW** WHEN THE SCALY FIEND BEGAN TO GROW--
--THAT SHE MEANT, IN TREACHERY, TO **DESERT** HIM THERE IN THE PALACE--
AND SO, HE WEIGHS HIS **DESIRE** FOR HER, AGAINST HIS INSTINCTIVE, HACKLE-RAISING **FEAR** OF CREATURES UNKNOWN AND **MAGIC-BIDDEN**...
FOR A FLEETING SECOND THE SCALES OF HIS BARBARIAN MIND ARE **BALANCED** BETWEEN HELPING...AND **FLEEING.**
THEN, HE SEES RED SONJA RAISE A SHAPELY ARM IN DESPERATE **DEFIANCE** OF THOSE SLAVERING, TOOTHSOME **JAWS**--
BACK TO **HELL,** DEMON-THING!
--AND THE SCALES ARE BALANCED **NO LONGER!**
MAYBE THE BLACK PITS OF HELL WILL LOOK **BETTER** TO YOU--
--WHEN YOU'VE NO MORE **FANGS** TO BITE WITH!
YOU **HEARD** THE WOMAN, MONSTER!
BUT ALTHOUGH, IN **NATURE**, SERPENTS WITH FANGS ARE RARELY **CONSTRICTORS**, AS WELL...
...THIS BEAST IS **NOT** OF NATURE...
...AND KNOWS NO **MORE** OF NATURE'S IRON-BOUND **LAWS**...

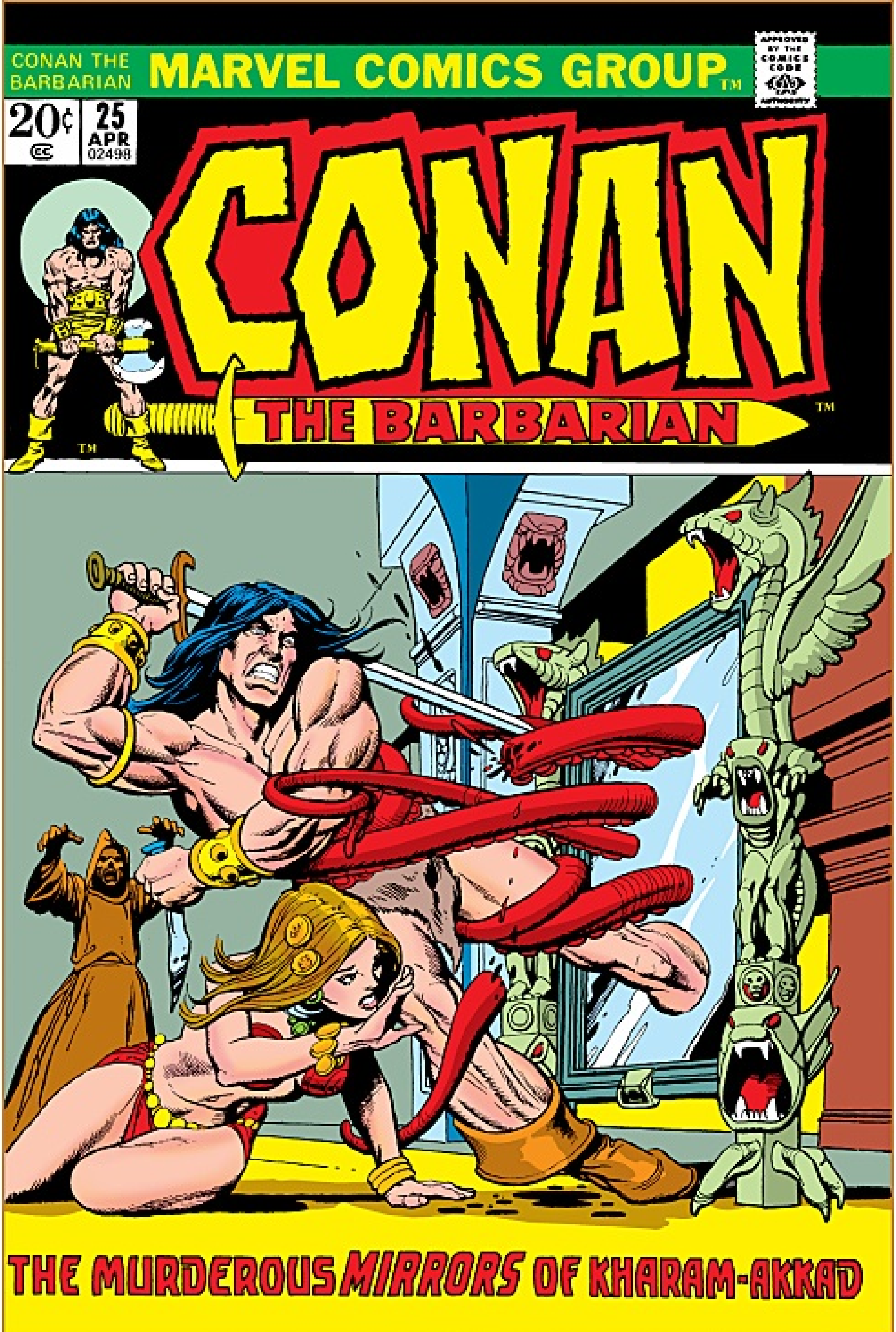

...THAN DOES A BLACK-MANED **FREEBOOTER**, BRED IN THE BLEAK HILLS OF THE NORTH!
MITRA! DOESN'T THIS THING KNOW-- WHEN IT'S **HELPLESS?**
IT WILL **NEVER** BE HELPLESS, CIMMERIAN--
--UNTIL IT'S **DEAD**--
--IF DIE IT **CAN!!**
FOR THE SHADOW OF A MOMENT, THE DEMON-SNAKE **LOOMS** ABOVE THE PAIR-- HESITANT, **UNCERTAIN** WHICH OF THE TWO FOOLS TO KILL **FIRST**...
AND, DURING THAT MOMENT, CONAN SEES HIS **CHANCE**...
...YET SCARCELY BEFORE THE GREAT SERPENT **SENSES** ITS PERIL...
...AND SWOOPS ANEW TO THE **ATTACK!**
BUT, THE BRIEF DELAY HAS ALLOWED CONAN TO REACH A JEWEL-FILLED **CASKET** NEARBY...
...AND FOR THE **CASKET**, IN TURN...
...TO REACH THE **SERPENT!**


CONAN NEVER WONDERS THAT THE GREAT HISSING ROAR OF THE SERPENT DOES NOT BRING GUARDS WITHOUT NUMBER POURING INTO THE TWILIGHT CHAMBER.
HE MERELY SNARLS TO LEARN THAT GOLD COINS ARE NOT FOR DIVING INTO!
CONAN! ARE YOU--?
I'M--ALL RIGHT, GIRL--
BUT, BY CROM AND ISHTAR BOTH--THAT SNAKE ISN'T GOING TO BE!
THIS NIGHT, EITHER IT DIES--OR I DO!
NOW STAND ASIDE!
NO! I'LL HELP YOU--WHETHER YOU WANT MY HELP OR NOT!
THEN BAT YOUR SEA-GREEN EYES AT THAT THING--OR MAYBE WIGGLE YOUR HIPS!
THAT WORKED WITH ME, AT ANY RATE!
I'LL FORGET THAT REMARK, CIMMERIAN, TILL WE'RE IN THE CLEAR AGAIN.
NOW, IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO SOMETHING, THEN DO IT--
--BECAUSE, THIS TIME, THE THING HAS DECIDED TO GO FOR ME!
CONAN--!?
I'M HERE, SON-YA!
AND THIS SPAWN OF HELL WILL WISH THAT I WERE NOT!!


EVEN A DEVIL-BEAST CAN DIE! THAT WHICH HAS BECOME FLESH-- EVEN SCALED FLESH--HAS BECOME BLOOD, AS WELL.
UNTIL THIS MOMENT, CONAN HAS DARED HOPE THE GREAT SERPENT WAS A MERE FIGMENT OF HIS IMAGINATION--A CREATION, PERHAPS, OF KHARAM-AKKAD'S FIENDISH MIRRORS--
BUT NOW, AS HE SPIRALS SWIFTLY UPWARD ATOP THE LONGNECK'S HORNED BROW, HE LEARNS THAT IT IS A LIVING THING--
--IN A MOST CONVINCING MANNER!
CROM!!
BUT, THIS HAS BEEN THE FINAL DEATH-LUNGE EVEN FOR A DRAGON BIRTHED IN MAGIC...
...AND SO, BOTH TOPPLE NOW TO THE DUST-CAKED, BLOOD-DRENCHED FLOOR BELOW...
...ONLY ONE OF THEM TO RISE AGAIN...!
MY APOLOGIES, CIMMERIAN. YOU WEREN'T RUNNING OUT ON ME, AFTER ALL, AS I--
TARIM'S BLOOD! THE SERPENT-THING IS--CHANGING!
DIDN'T--YOU KNOW--IT WOULD--GIRL?
AND HOW MUCH--MORE DID YOU KNOW--THAT YOU NEVER TOLD ME?


PRECIOUS LITTLE, BLACK-MANE... THOUGH I DOUBT YOU'LL BELIEVE ME.
EXCEPT THAT PAH-DISHAH'S WIZARD GAVE ME A PHRASE TO SPEAK, TO KEEP THE SERPENT-BAND FROM SPRINGING TO LIFE.
BUT, IN THE HEAT OF EXCITEMENT, I FORGOT TILL TOO LATE TO SAY...
"...KA NAMA KAA LAJERAMA."
IT BECOMES --A TIARA?!
AND THAT PHRASE YOU SPOKE-- IT IS NEW TO MY EARS, AND YET--
MEN SAY KING KULL OF VALUSIA VOICED IT, BEFORE ATLANTIS SANK --THAT IT GAVE HIM POWER AGAINST THE SERPENT RACE--
--ONE OF WHOSE MINIONS LIES IMPRISONED WITHIN THIS TIARA --FOREVER.
I WANT ONLY THIS. BUT, IF YOU WANT TO GO BACK FOR THE JEWELS...
NO. I'VE GOT TO GO ON LIVING IN THIS CITY, AFTER ALL.
BESIDES, I FOUGHT THIS NIGHT FOR OTHER REWARDS.
SO SLOW DOWN, WOMAN...
...WE'VE GOT ALL NIGHT BEFORE US!
PERHAPS YOU DO, MAN...
BUT I--
--DO NOT!!
THE SILKEN STRAND BURNS LIKE DRY STRAW AT THE TOUCH OF THE MAGIC-BORN FLAME...
AND CONAN HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO LET LOOSE THE FAST-BURNING ROPE...
...AND TAKE YET A THIRD STEEP FALL THIS MEMORABLE EVENING!
DOOWHHHH
MY LEG-- FEELS LIKE IT'S THE THING ON FIRE--!
BUT THAT WON'T STOP ME NOW!
BY ISHTAR, GIRL, YOU'LL PAY WITH KISSES A-PLENTY FOR--
NO MAN'S LIPS SHALL EVER TOUCH MINE, CIMMERIAN--


--SAVE THOSE OF HIM WHO HAS *DEFEATED* ME ON THE FIELD OF *BATTLE*--
--AND *THAT*, EVEN *YOU* SHALL NEVER DO.!!
UNNH
OH--BUT DON'T FEEL *TOO* BADLY ABOUT BEING *USED*, BARBARIAN.!
I REALLY *DID* RATHER LIKE YOU... IN MY *WAY*.
AND NOW, I'M OFF TO *PAH-DISHAH*, SO...
GOODBYYYY
NO. *NOT* GOODBYE, WENCH.
WE'LL MEET *AGAIN*, SOME BRIGHT DAY.
OR SOME DARK *NIGHT*.
AND *THEN*, BY CROM--!
OWWR!
WELL, I'VE BRUISED MY *HAND* THIS NIGHT...
AND MY *LEG* SMARTS, AS THOUGH KICKED BY A *MULE*.
PERHAPS I'D BEST GET BACK TO *BARRACKS*...
...WHILE I'VE STILL *MEMBERS* LEFT TO CALL MY *OWN*....!
FINIS


CONAN THE BARBARIAN
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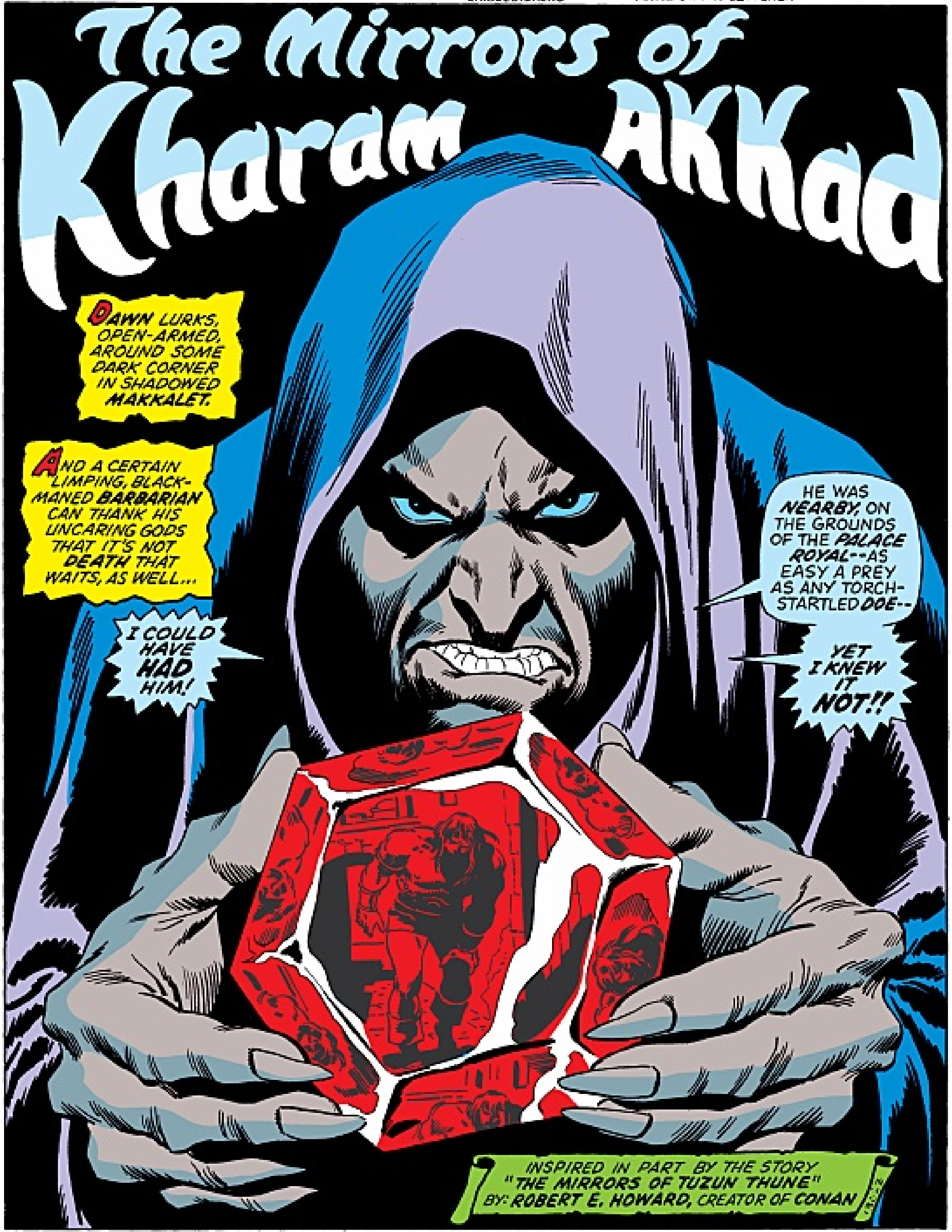
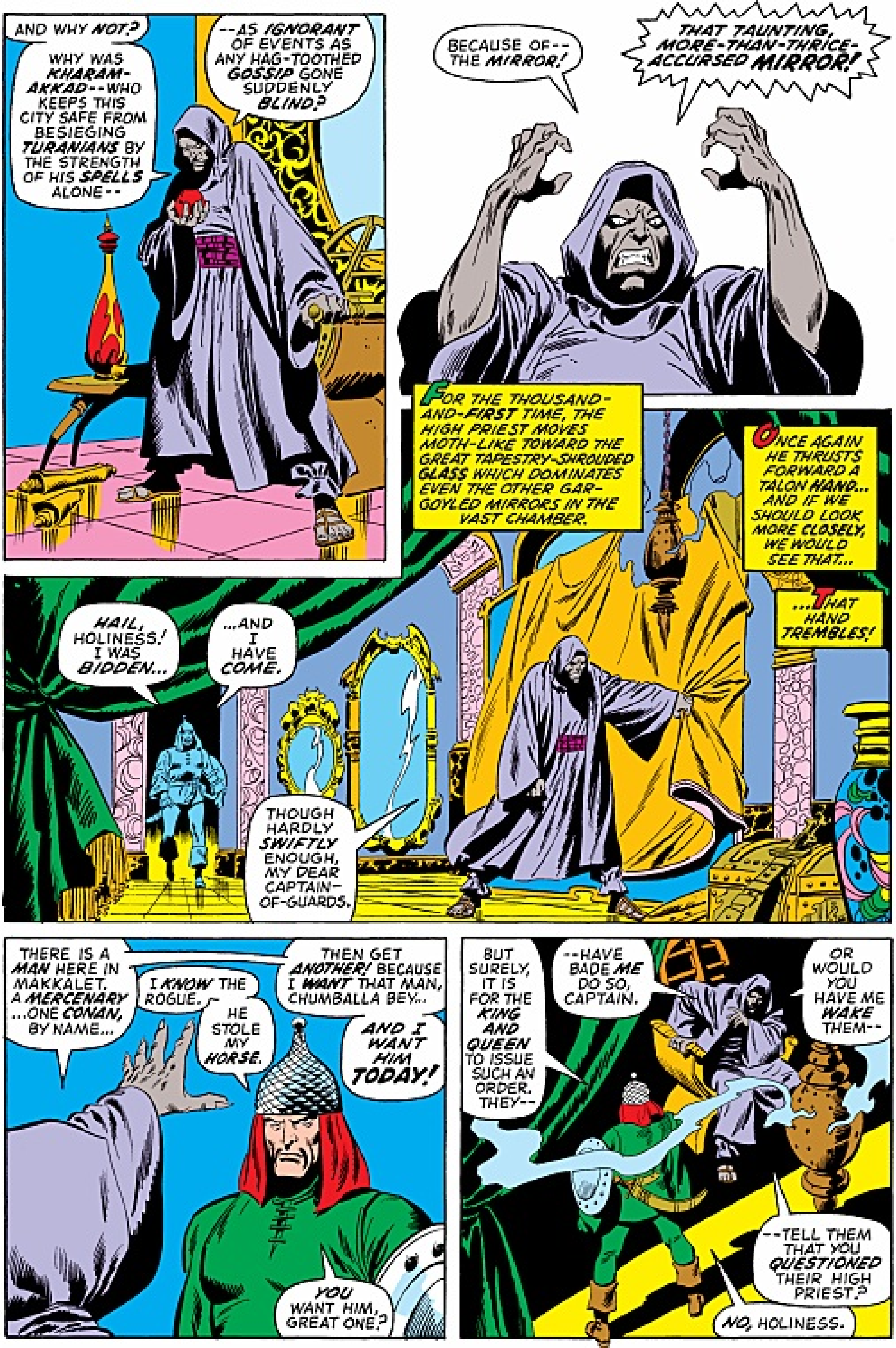
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN™
THE MURDEROUS MIRRORS OF KHARAM-AKKAD

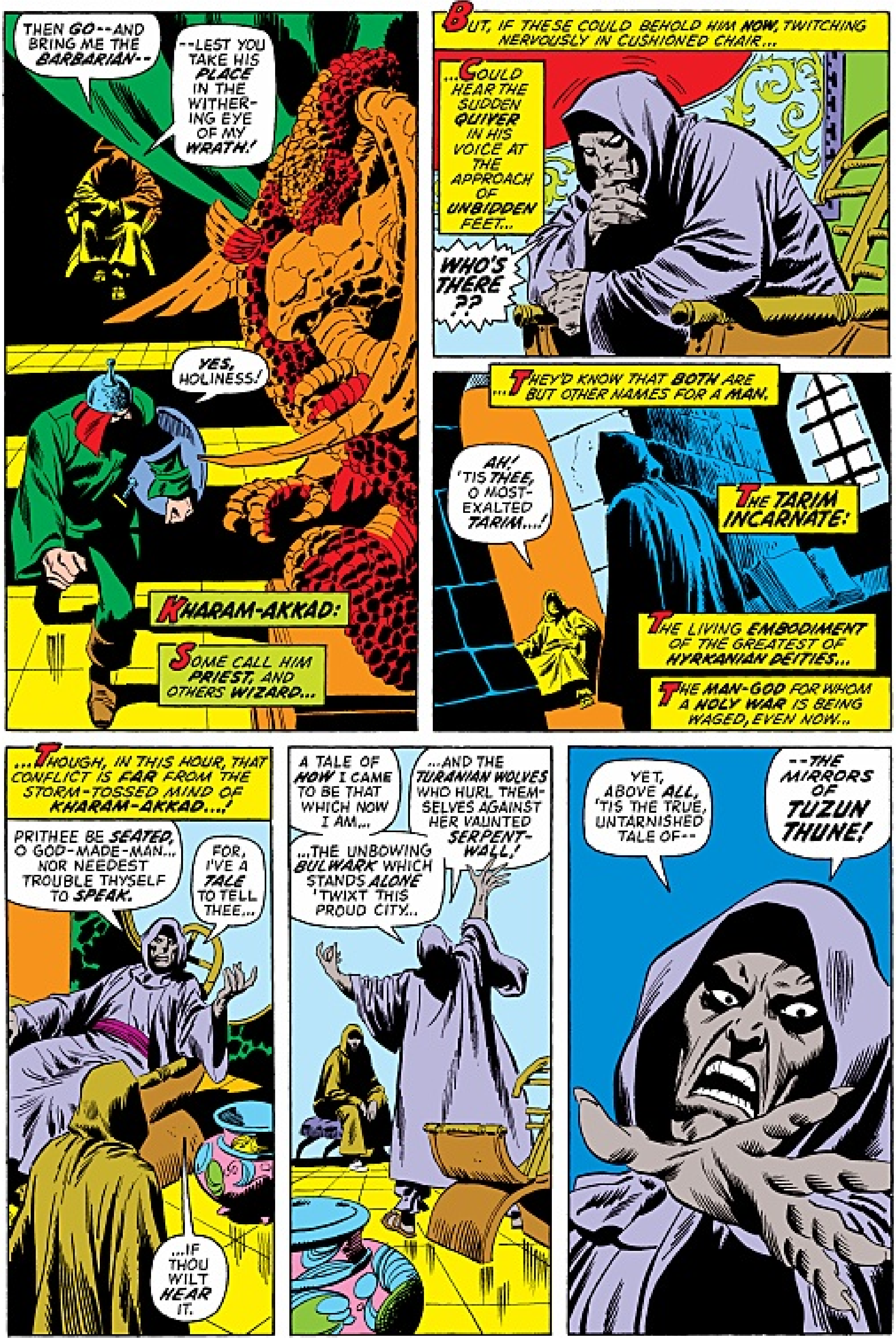
COVER PENCILER: GIL KANE COVER INKER: RALPH REESE

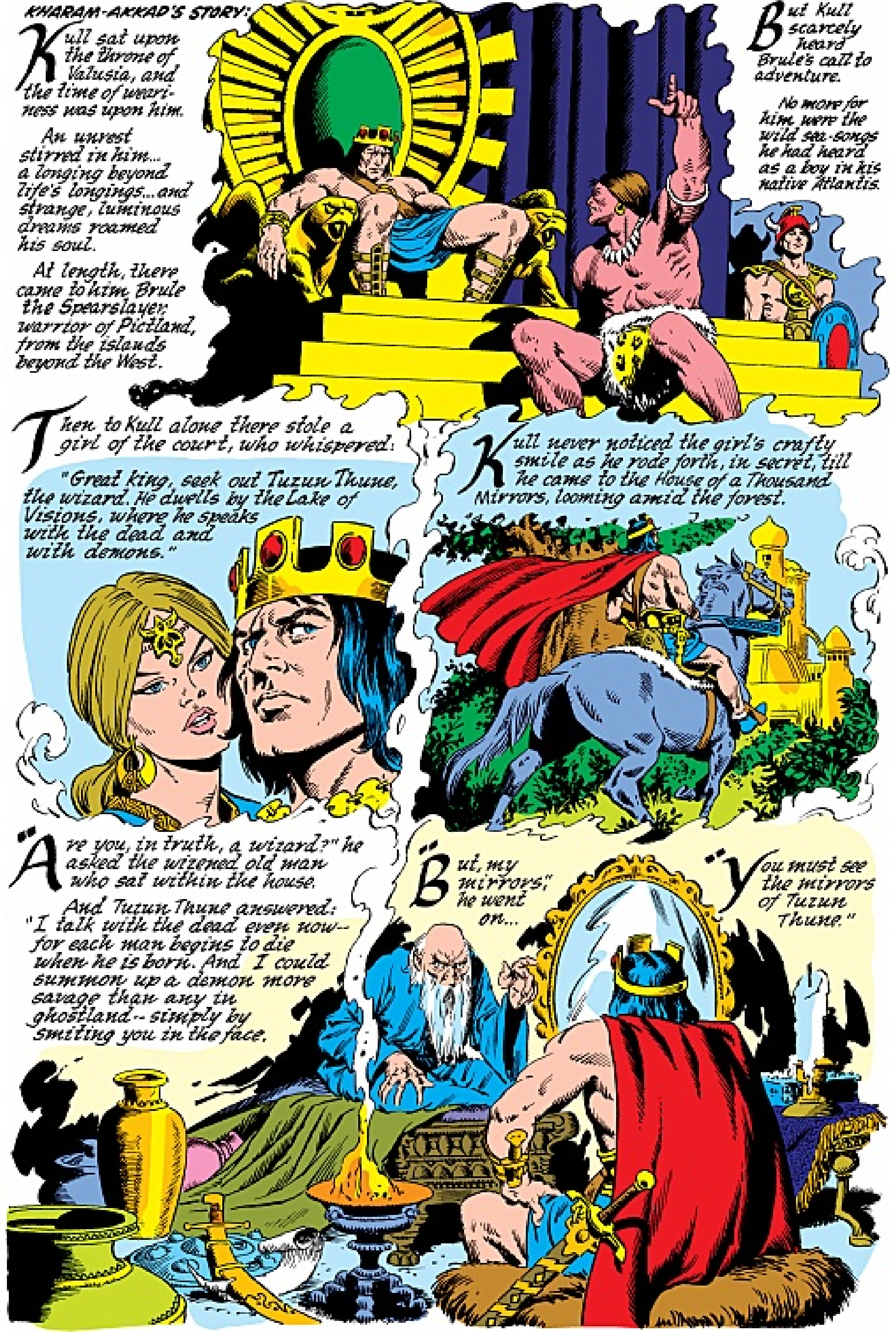
Stan Lee presents: **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**™

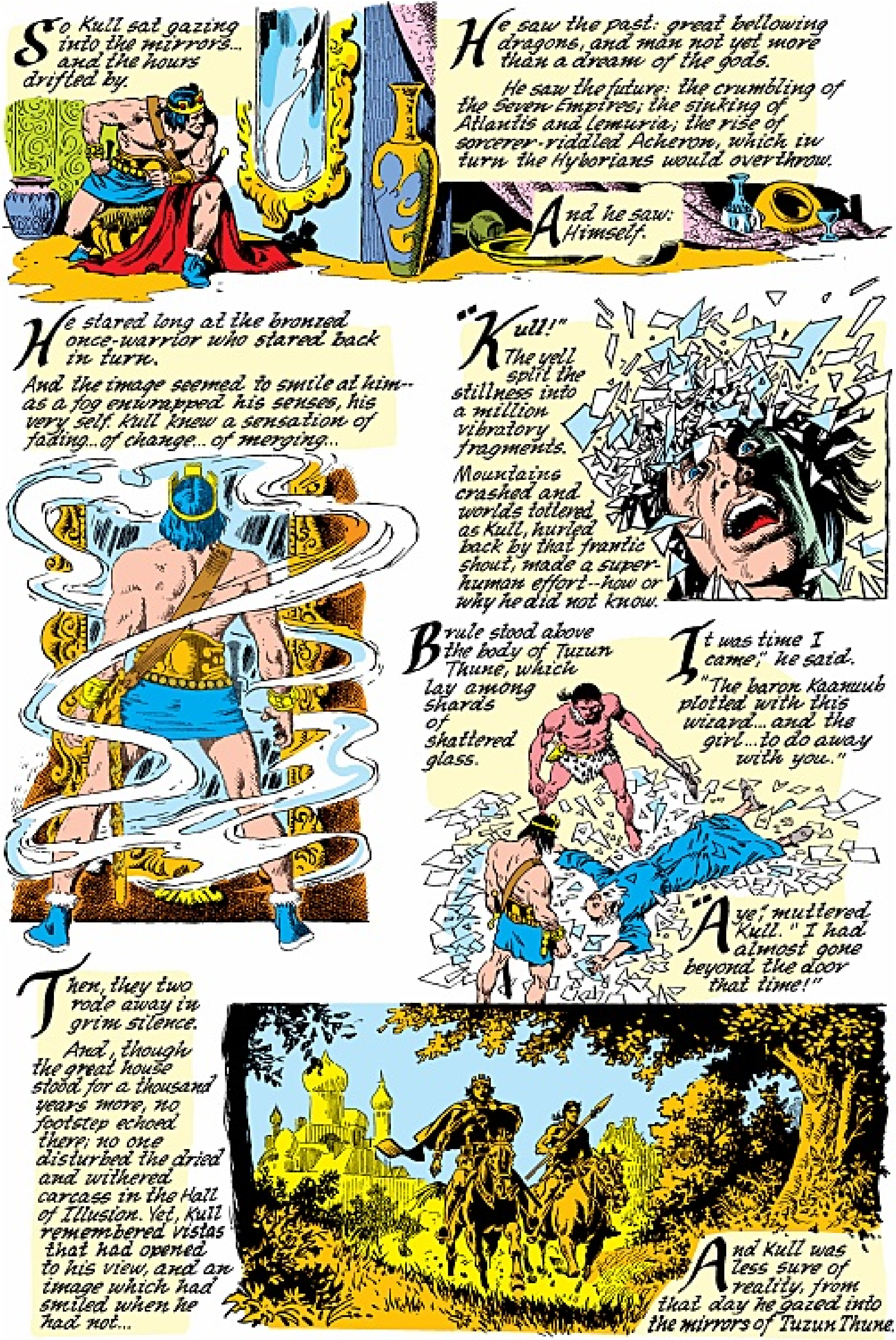
ROY THOMAS writer/editor * JOHN BUSCEMA artist * S. BUSCEMA and J. SEVERIN embellishers * MARIE SEVERIN colorist ARTIE SIMEK letterer * CO-PLOTTED BY BARRY SMITH

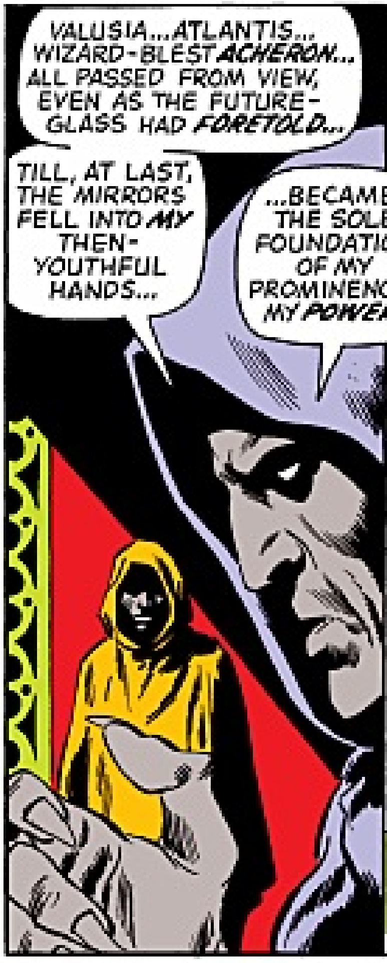

The Mirrors of Kharam Akkad
DAWN LURKS, OPEN-ARMED, AROUND SOME DARK CORNER IN SHADOWED MAKKALET.
AND A CERTAIN LIMPING, BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN CAN THANK HIS UNCARING GODS THAT IT'S NOT DEATH THAT WAITS, AS WELL...
I COULD HAVE HAD HIM!
HE WAS NEARBY, ON THE GROUNDS OF THE PALACE ROYAL--AS EASY A PREY AS ANY TORCH-STARTLED DOE--
YET I KNEW IT NOT!!
INSPIRED IN PART BY THE STORY "THE MIRRORS OF TUZUN THUNE" BY: ROBERT E. HOWARD, CREATOR OF CONAN

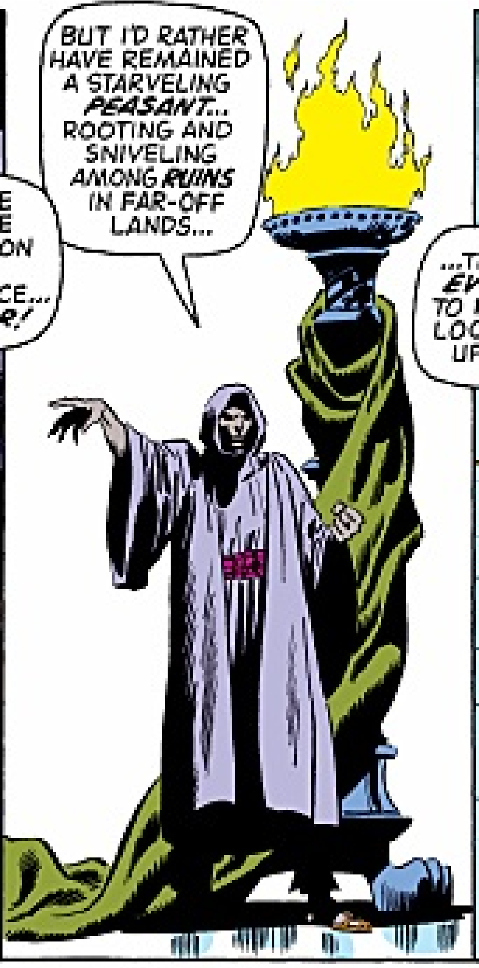

AND WHY *NOT?*
WHY WAS *KHARAM-AKKAD*--WHO KEEPS THIS CITY SAFE FROM BESIEGING *TURANIANS* BY THE STRENGTH OF HIS *SPELLS* ALONE--
--AS *IGNORANT* OF EVENTS AS ANY HAG-TOOTHED *GOSSIP* GONE SUDDENLY *BLIND?*
BECAUSE OF--THE *MIRROR!*
THAT TAUNTING, MORE-THAN-THRICE-ACCURSED **MIRROR!**
FOR THE THOUSAND-AND-*FIRST* TIME, THE HIGH PRIEST MOVES MOTH-LIKE TOWARD THE GREAT TAPESTRY-SHROUDED *GLASS* WHICH DOMINATES EVEN THE OTHER GARGOYLED MIRRORS IN THE VAST CHAMBER.
ONCE AGAIN HE THRUSTS FORWARD A TALON *HAND*... AND IF WE SHOULD LOOK MORE *CLOSELY,* WE WOULD SEE THAT...
...THAT HAND *TREMBLES!*
HAIL, HOLINESS! I WAS *BIDDEN*...
...AND I HAVE *COME.*
THOUGH HARDLY *SWIFTLY* ENOUGH, MY DEAR CAPTAIN-OF-GUARDS.
THERE IS A *MAN* HERE IN MAKKALET. A *MERCENARY* ...ONE *CONAN,* BY NAME...
I *KNOW* THE ROGUE.
HE STOLE MY *HORSE.*
THEN GET *ANOTHER!* BECAUSE I *WANT* THAT MAN, CHUMBALLA BEY...
AND I WANT HIM TODAY!
YOU WANT HIM, GREAT ONE?
BUT SURELY, IT IS FOR THE *KING AND QUEEN* TO ISSUE SUCH AN ORDER. THEY--
--HAVE BADE *ME* DO SO, CAPTAIN.
OR WOULD YOU HAVE ME *WAKE* THEM--
--TELL THEM THAT YOU *QUESTIONED* THEIR HIGH PRIEST?
NO, HOLINESS.

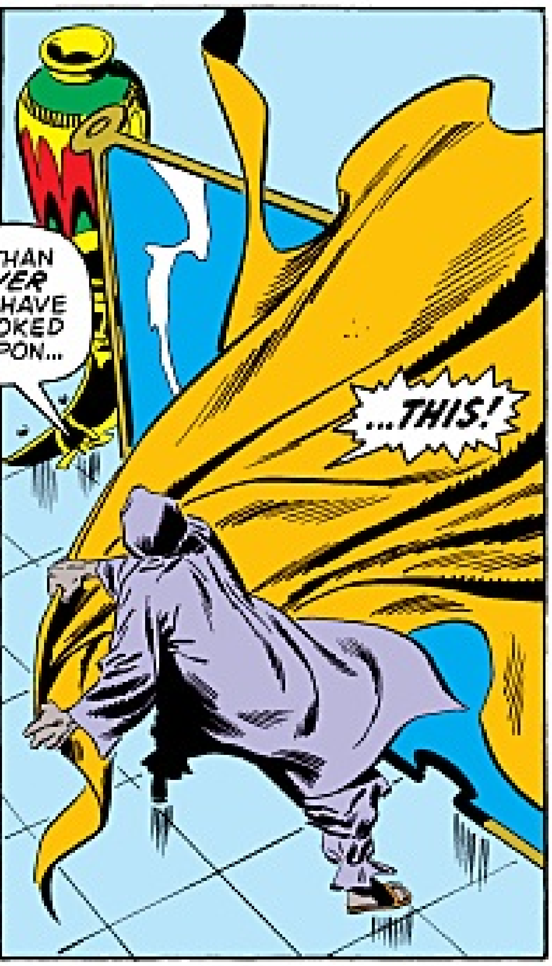

THEN GO--AND BRING ME THE BARBARIAN--
--LEST YOU TAKE HIS PLACE IN THE WITHERING EYE OF MY WRATH!
YES, HOLINESS!
KHARAM-AKKAD:
SOME CALL HIM PRIEST, AND OTHERS WIZARD...
BUT, IF THESE COULD BEHOLD HIM NOW, TWITCHING NERVOUSLY IN CUSHIONED CHAIR...
...COULD HEAR THE SUDDEN QUIVER IN HIS VOICE AT THE APPROACH OF UNBIDDEN FEET...
WHO'S THERE ??
...THEY'D KNOW THAT BOTH ARE BUT OTHER NAMES FOR A MAN.
AH! 'TIS THEE, O MOST-EXALTED TARIM...!
THE TARIM INCARNATE:
THE LIVING EMBODIMENT OF THE GREATEST OF HYRKANIAN DEITIES...
THE MAN-GOD FOR WHOM A HOLY WAR IS BEING WAGED, EVEN NOW...
...THOUGH, IN THIS HOUR, THAT CONFLICT IS FAR FROM THE STORM-TOSSED MIND OF KHARAM-AKKAD...!
PRITHEE BE SEATED, O GOD-MADE-MAN... NOR NEEDEST TROUBLE THYSELF TO SPEAK.
FOR, I'VE A TALE TO TELL THEE...
...IF THOU WILT HEAR IT.
A TALE OF HOW I CAME TO BE THAT WHICH NOW I AM...
...THE UNBOWING BULWARK WHICH STANDS ALONE 'TWIXT THIS PROUD CITY...
...AND THE TURANIAN WOLVES WHO HURL THEMSELVES AGAINST HER VAUNTED SERPENT-WALL!
YET, ABOVE ALL, 'TIS THE TRUE, UNTARNISHED TALE OF--
--THE MIRRORS OF TUZUN THUNE!

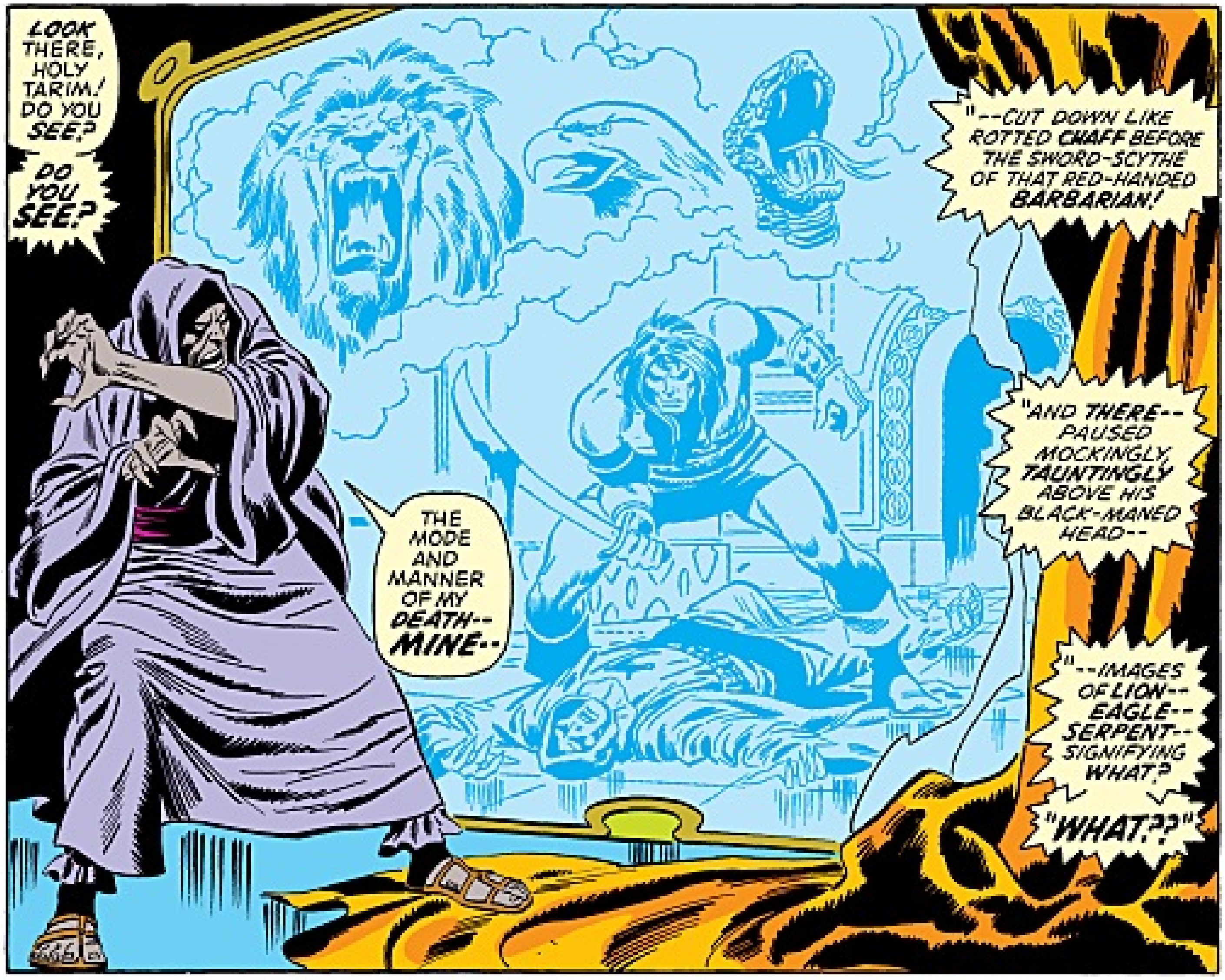

KHARAM-AKKAD'S STORY:
Kull sat upon the Throne of Valusia, and the time of weariness was upon him.
An unrest stirred in him... a longing beyond life's longings...and strange, luminous dreams roamed his soul.
At length, there came to him Brule the Spearslayer, warrior of Pictland, from the islands beyond the West.
But Kull scarcely heard Brule's call to adventure.
No more for him, were the wild sea-songs he had heard as a boy in his native Atlantis.
Then to Kull alone there stole a girl of the court, who whispered:
"Great king, seek out Tuzun Thune, the wizard. He dwells by the Lake of Visions, where he speaks with the dead and with demons."
Kull never noticed the girl's crafty smile as he rode forth, in secret, till he came to the House of a Thousand Mirrors, looming amid the forest.
"Are you, in truth, a wizard?" he asked the wizened old man who sat within the house.
And Tuzun Thune answered: "I talk with the dead even now--for each man begins to die when he is born. And I could summon up a demon more savage than any in ghostland--simply by smiting you in the face.
"But, my mirrors," he went on...
"You must see the mirrors of Tuzun Thune."

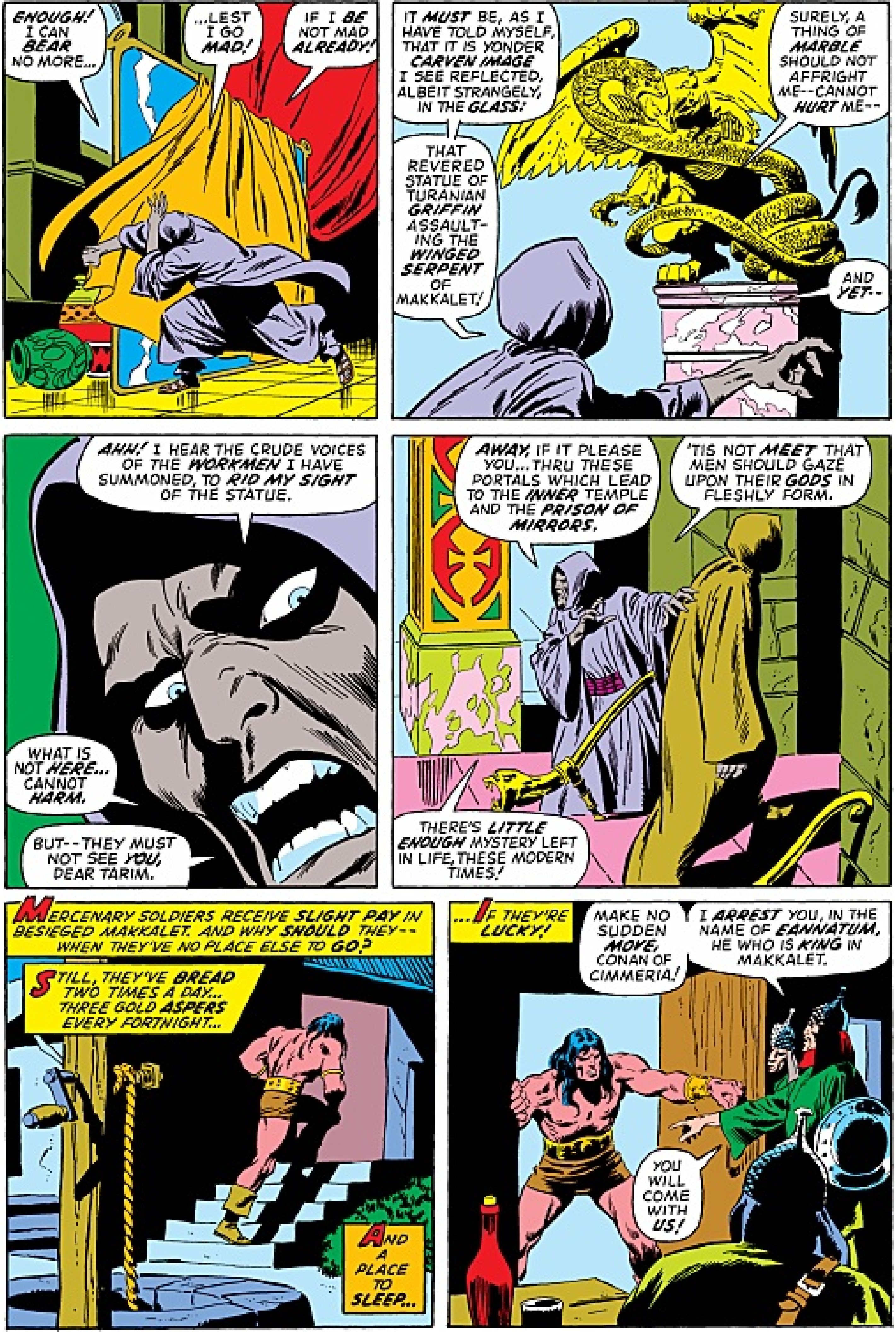

So Kull sat gazing into the mirrors... and the hours drifted by.
He saw the past: great bellowing dragons, and man not yet more than a dream of the gods.
He saw the future: the crumbling of the Seven Empires; the sinking of Atlantis and Lemuria; the rise of sorcerer-riddled Acheron, which in turn the Hyborians would overthrow.
And he saw: Himself.
He stared long at the bronzed once-warrior who stared back in turn.
And the image seemed to smile at him-- as a fog enwrapped his senses, his very self. Kull knew a sensation of fading... of change... of merging...
"Kull!"
The yell split the stillness into a million vibratory fragments.
Mountains crashed and worlds tottered as Kull, hurled back by that frantic shout, made a super-human effort--how or why he did not know.
Brule stood above the body of Tuzun Thune, which lay among shards of shattered glass.
"It was time I came," he said.
"The baron Kaanuub plotted with this wizard... and the girl... to do away with you."
"Aye," muttered Kull. "I had almost gone beyond the door that time!"
Then, they two rode away in grim silence.
And, though the great house stood for a thousand years more, no footstep echoed there; no one disturbed the dried and withered carcass in the Hall of Illusion. Yet, Kull remembered vistas that had opened to his view, and an image which had smiled when he had not...
And Kull was less sure of reality, from that day he gazed into the mirrors of Tuzun Thune.

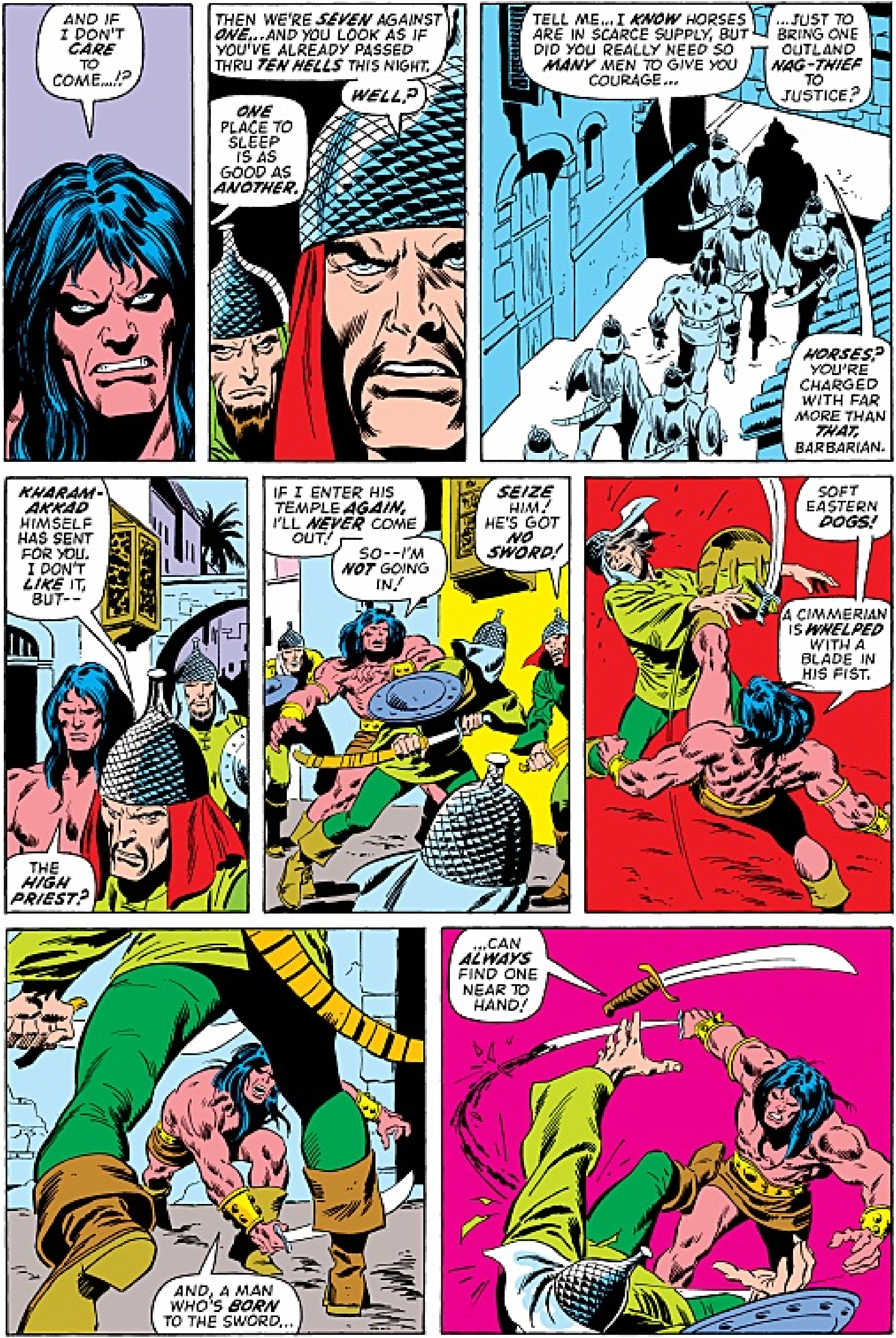

VALUSIA...ATLANTIS... WIZARD-BLEST ACHERON... ALL PASSED FROM VIEW, EVEN AS THE FUTURE-GLASS HAD FORETOLD...
TILL, AT LAST, THE MIRRORS FELL INTO MY THEN-YOUTHFUL HANDS...
...BECAME THE SOLE FOUNDATION OF MY PROMINENCE... MY POWER!

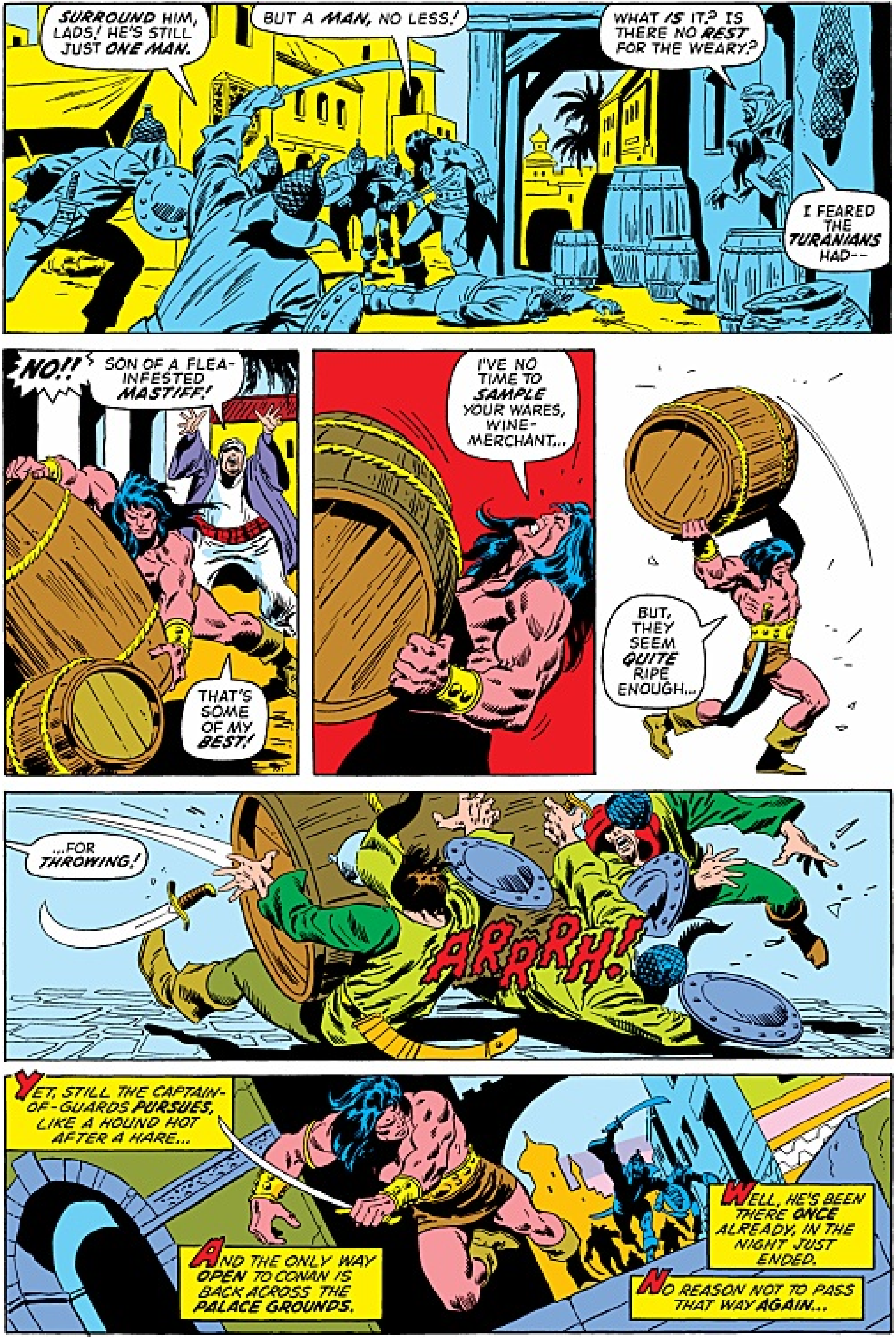

BUT I'D RATHER HAVE REMAINED A STARVELING PEASANT... ROOTING AND SNIVELING AMONG RUINS IN FAR-OFF LANDS...

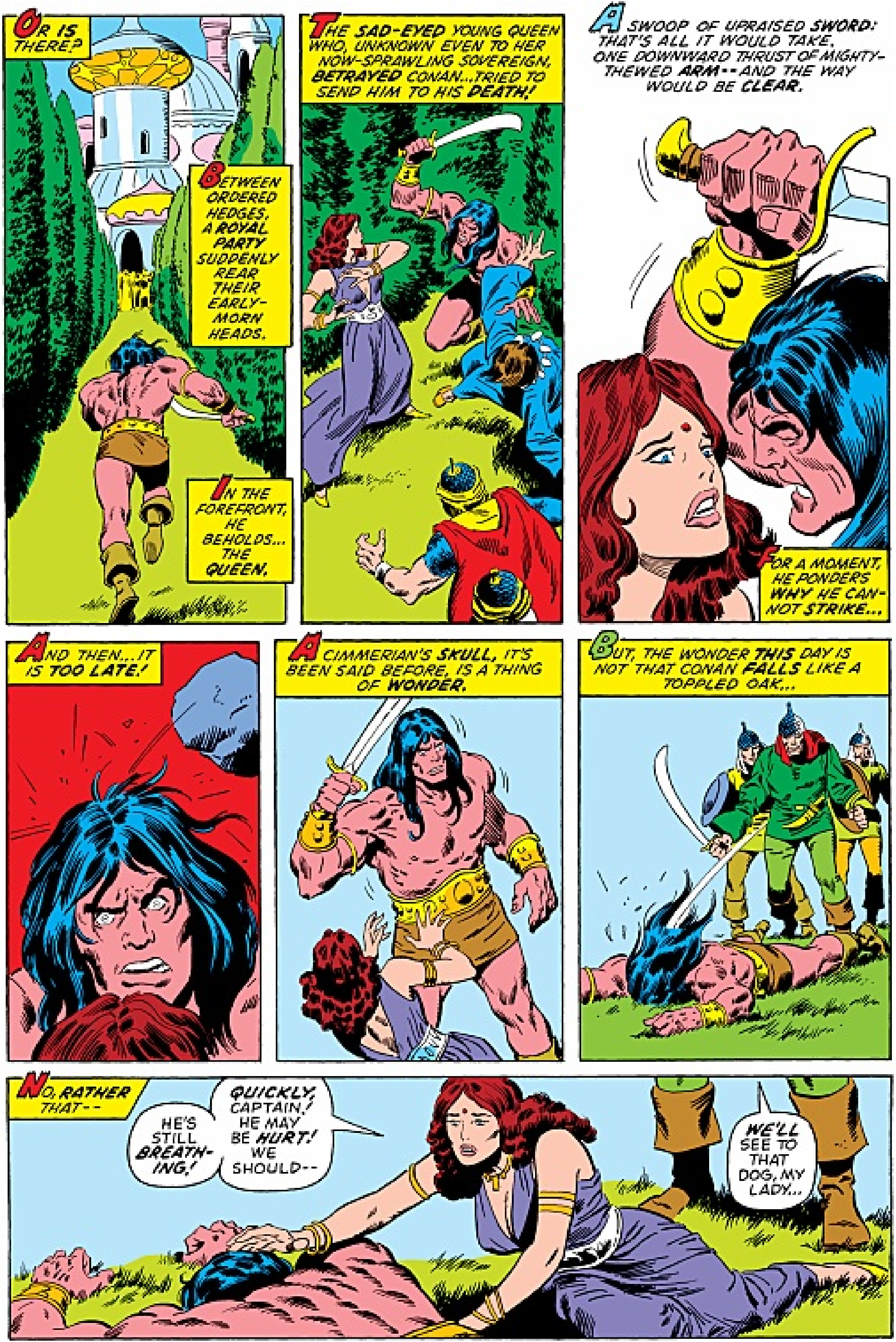

...THAN EVER TO HAVE LOOKED UPON...
...THIS!

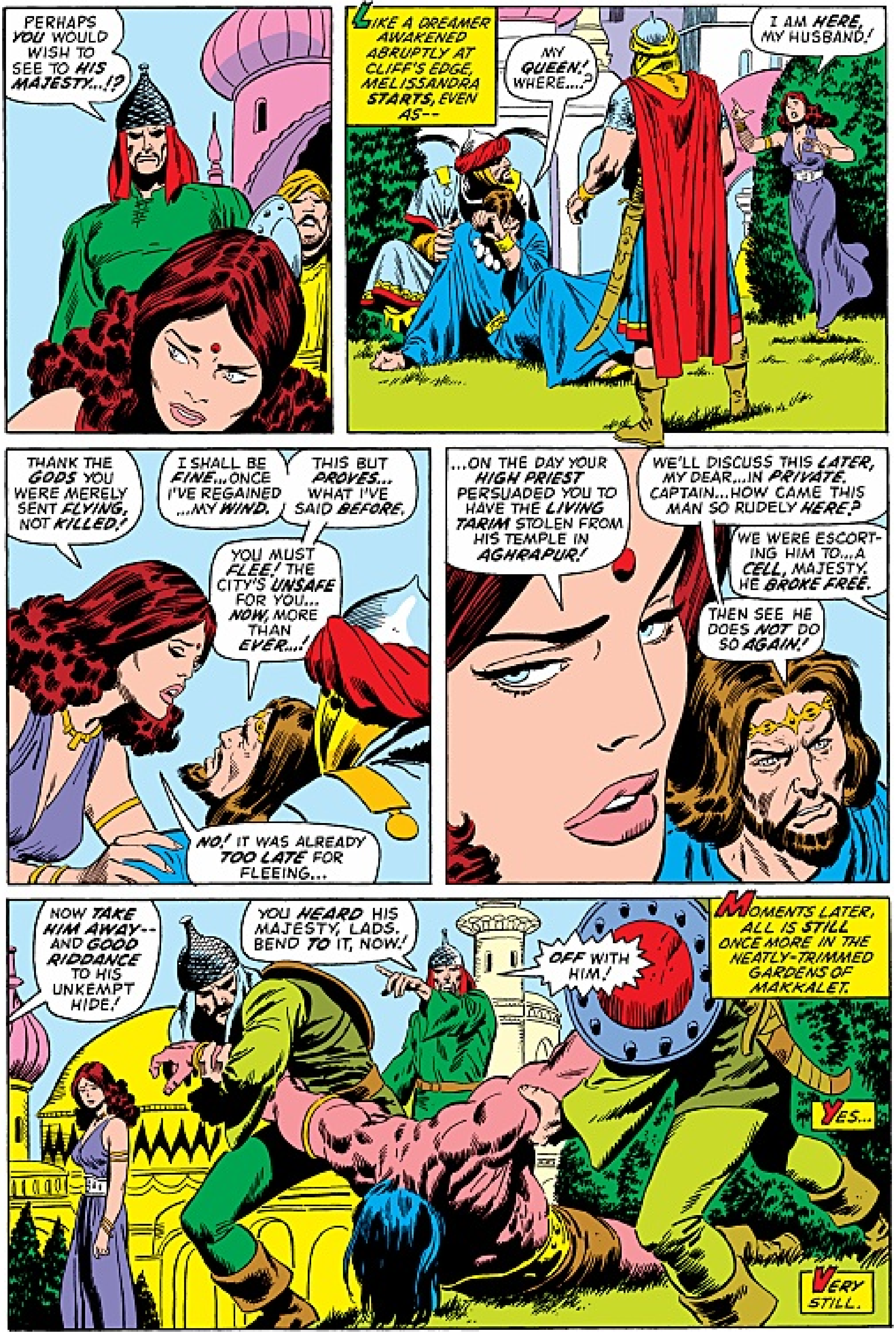

LOOK THERE, HOLY TARIM! DO YOU SEE?
DO YOU SEE?
THE MODE AND MANNER OF MY DEATH-- MINE--
"--CUT DOWN LIKE ROTTED CHAFF BEFORE THE SWORD-SCYTHE OF THAT RED-HANDED BARBARIAN!
"AND THERE-- PAUSED MOCKINGLY, TAUNTINGLY ABOVE HIS BLACK-MANED HEAD--
"--IMAGES OF LION-- EAGLE-- SERPENT-- SIGNIFYING WHAT?
"WHAT??"

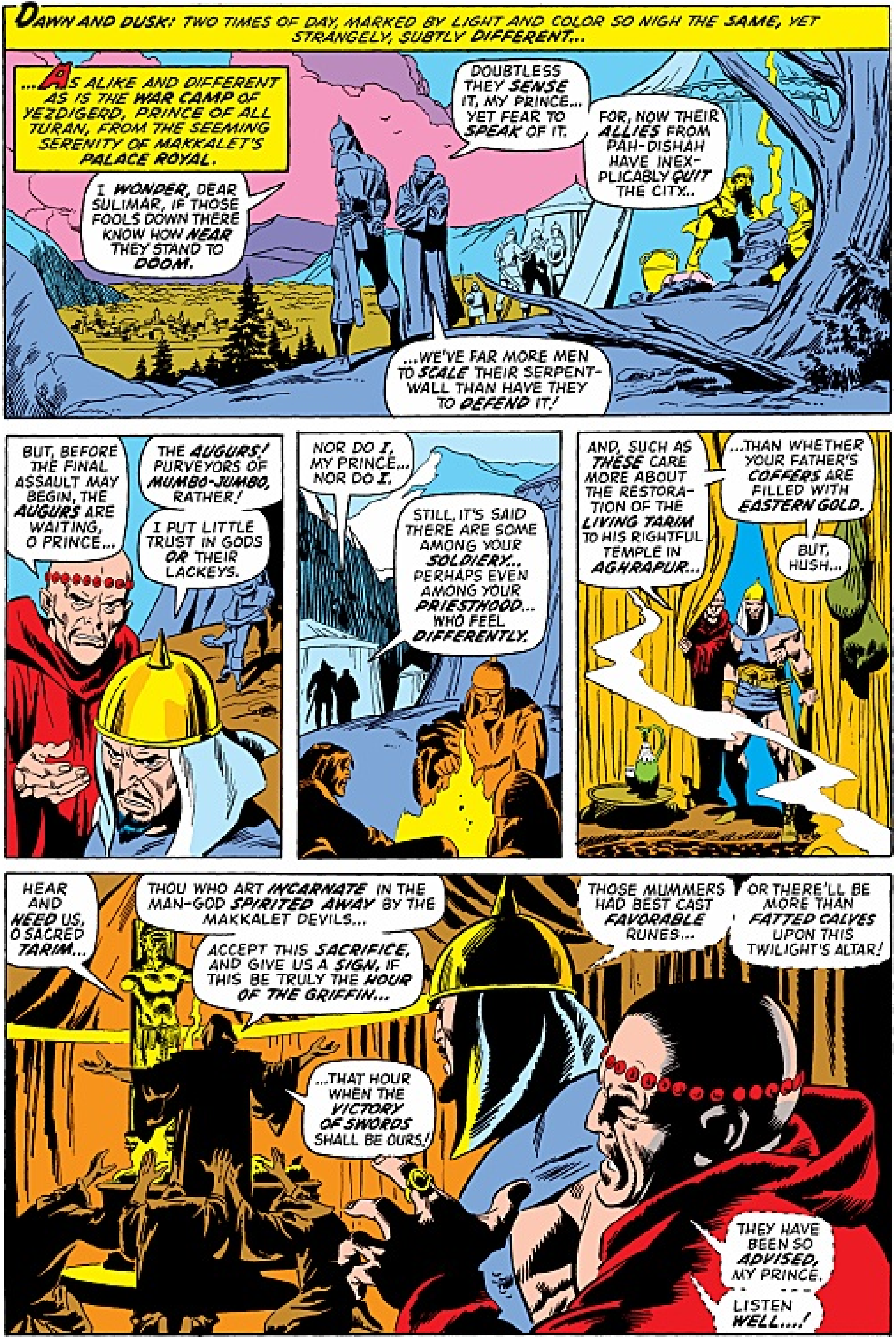

ENOUGH! I CAN BEAR NO MORE...
...LEST I GO MAD!
IF I BE NOT MAD ALREADY!
IT MUST BE, AS I HAVE TOLD MYSELF, THAT IT IS YONDER CARVEN IMAGE I SEE REFLECTED, ALBEIT STRANGELY, IN THE GLASS!
THAT REVERED STATUE OF TURANIAN GRIFFIN ASSAULTING THE WINGED SERPENT OF MAKKALET!
SURELY, A THING OF MARBLE SHOULD NOT AFFRIGHT ME--CANNOT HURT ME--
AND YET--
AHH! I HEAR THE CRUDE VOICES OF THE WORKMEN I HAVE SUMMONED, TO RID MY SIGHT OF THE STATUE.
WHAT IS NOT HERE... CANNOT HARM.
BUT--THEY MUST NOT SEE YOU, DEAR TARIM.
AWAY, IF IT PLEASE YOU...THRU THESE PORTALS WHICH LEAD TO THE INNER TEMPLE AND THE PRISON OF MIRRORS.
'TIS NOT MEET THAT MEN SHOULD GAZE UPON THEIR GODS IN FLESHLY FORM.
THERE'S LITTLE ENOUGH MYSTERY LEFT IN LIFE, THESE MODERN TIMES!
MERCENARY SOLDIERS RECEIVE SLIGHT PAY IN BESIEGED MAKKALET. AND WHY SHOULD THEY--WHEN THEY'VE NO PLACE ELSE TO GO?
STILL, THEY'VE BREAD TWO TIMES A DAY... THREE GOLD ASPERS EVERY FORTNIGHT...
AND A PLACE TO SLEEP...
...IF THEY'RE LUCKY!
MAKE NO SUDDEN MOVE, CONAN OF CIMMERIA!
I ARREST YOU, IN THE NAME OF EANNATUM, HE WHO IS KING IN MAKKALET.
YOU WILL COME WITH US!

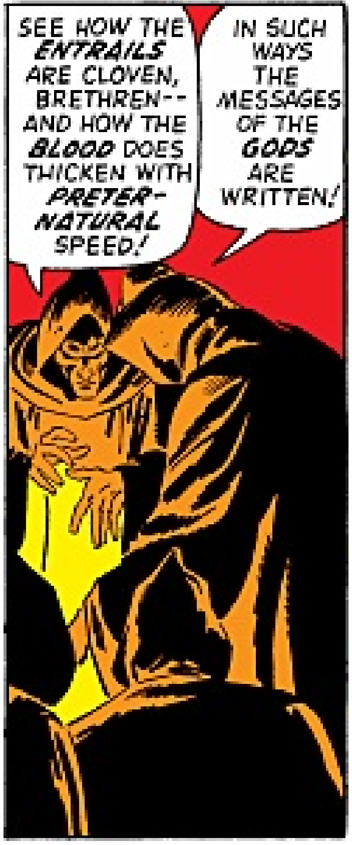

AND IF I DON'T *CARE* TO COME...!?
THEN WE'RE *SEVEN* AGAINST *ONE*...AND YOU LOOK AS IF YOU'VE ALREADY PASSED THRU *TEN HELLS* THIS NIGHT.
WELL,?
ONE PLACE TO SLEEP IS AS GOOD AS *ANOTHER.*
TELL ME... I *KNOW* HORSES ARE IN SCARCE SUPPLY, BUT DID YOU REALLY NEED SO *MANY* MEN TO GIVE YOU COURAGE...
...JUST TO BRING ONE OUTLAND *NAG-THIEF* TO JUSTICE?
HORSES? YOU'RE CHARGED WITH FAR MORE THAN *THAT,* BARBARIAN.
KHARAM-AKKAD HIMSELF HAS SENT FOR YOU. I DON'T *LIKE* IT, BUT--
THE *HIGH PRIEST?*
IF I ENTER HIS TEMPLE *AGAIN,* I'LL *NEVER* COME OUT!
SO--I'M *NOT* GOING IN!
SEIZE HIM! HE'S GOT *NO SWORD!*
SOFT EASTERN *DOGS!*
A CIMMERIAN IS *WHELPED* WITH A BLADE IN HIS FIST.
AND, A MAN WHO'S *BORN* TO THE SWORD...
...CAN *ALWAYS* FIND ONE NEAR TO HAND!

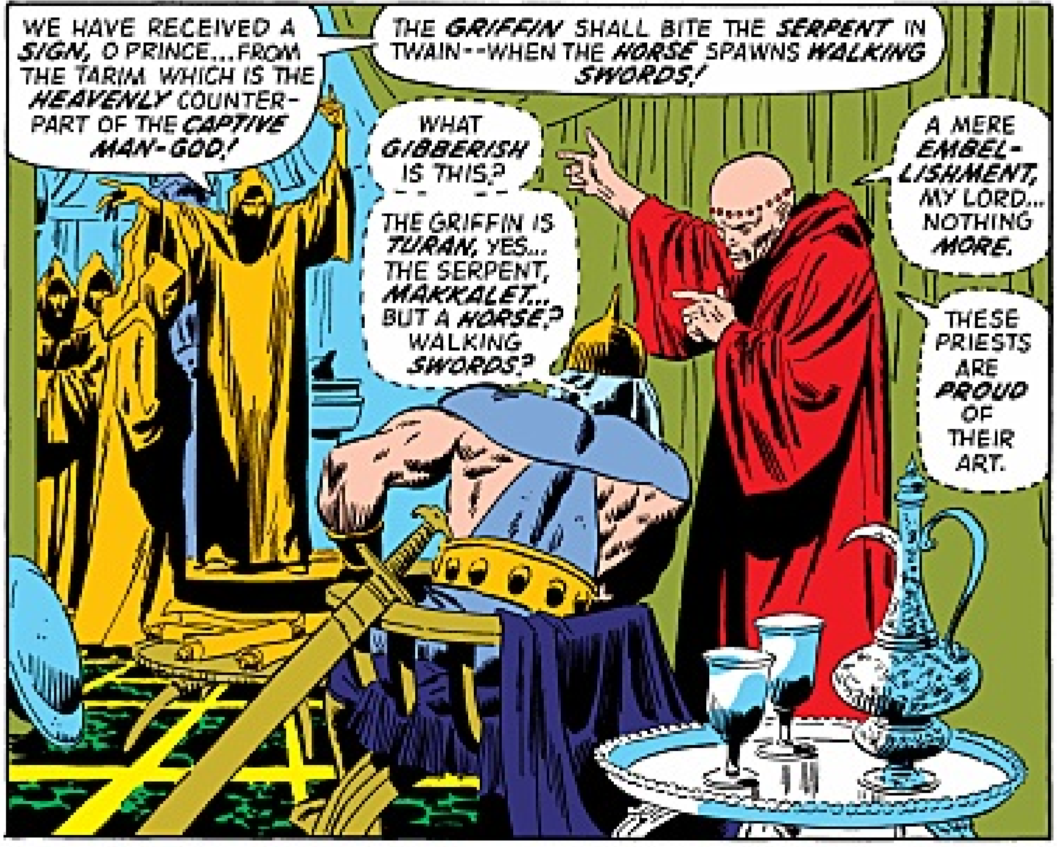

SURROUND HIM, LADS! HE'S STILL JUST ONE MAN.
BUT A MAN, NO LESS!
WHAT IS IT? IS THERE NO REST FOR THE WEARY?
I FEARED THE TURANIANS HAD--
NO!!
SON OF A FLEA-INFESTED MASTIFF!
THAT'S SOME OF MY BEST!
I'VE NO TIME TO SAMPLE YOUR WARES, WINE-MERCHANT...
BUT, THEY SEEM QUITE RIPE ENOUGH...
...FOR THROWING!
ARRRH!
YET, STILL THE CAPTAIN-OF-GUARDS PURSUES, LIKE A HOUND HOT AFTER A HARE...
AND THE ONLY WAY OPEN TO CONAN IS BACK ACROSS THE PALACE GROUNDS.
WELL, HE'S BEEN THERE ONCE ALREADY, IN THE NIGHT JUST ENDED.
NO REASON NOT TO PASS THAT WAY AGAIN...

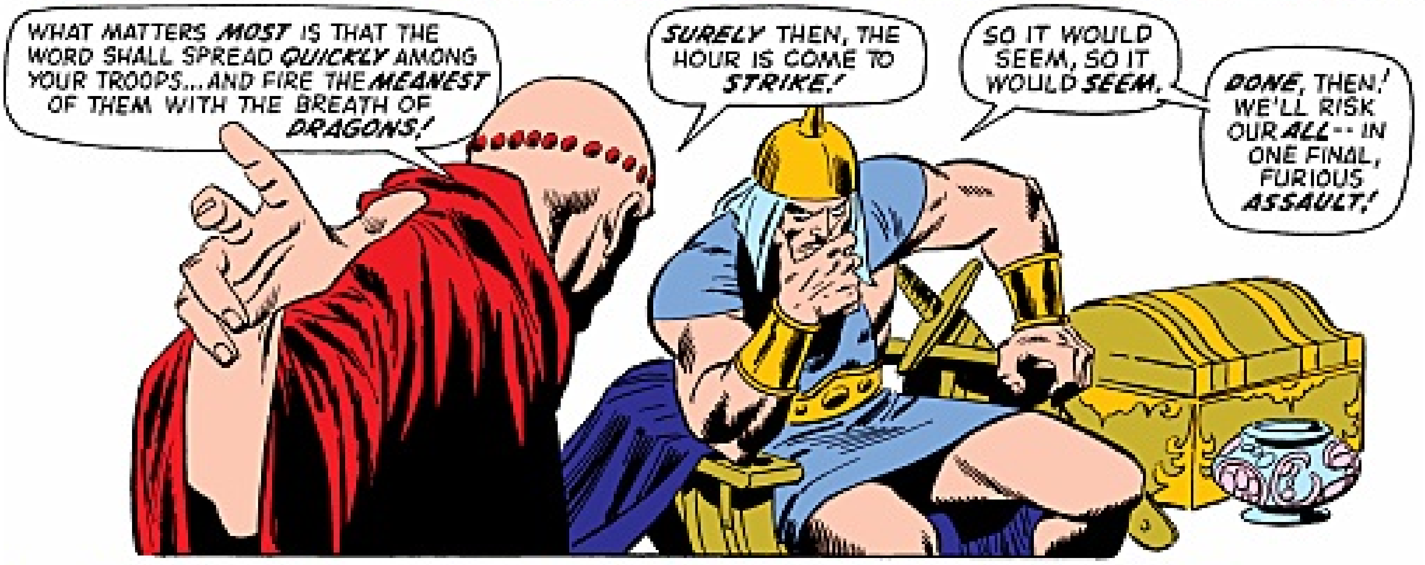

OR IS THERE?
BETWEEN ORDERED HEDGES, A ROYAL PARTY SUDDENLY REAR THEIR EARLY-MORN HEADS.
IN THE FOREFRONT, HE BEHOLDS... THE QUEEN.
THE SAD-EYED YOUNG QUEEN WHO, UNKNOWN EVEN TO HER NOW-SPRAWLING SOVEREIGN, BETRAYED CONAN...TRIED TO SEND HIM TO HIS DEATH!
A SWOOP OF UPRAISED SWORD: THAT'S ALL IT WOULD TAKE. ONE DOWNWARD THRUST OF MIGHTY-THEWED ARM-- AND THE WAY WOULD BE CLEAR.
FOR A MOMENT, HE PONDERS WHY HE CANNOT STRIKE...
AND THEN... IT IS TOO LATE!
A CIMMERIAN'S SKULL, IT'S BEEN SAID BEFORE, IS A THING OF WONDER.
BUT, THE WONDER THIS DAY IS NOT THAT CONAN FALLS LIKE A TOPPLED OAK...
NO, RATHER THAT--
HE'S STILL BREATHING!
QUICKLY, CAPTAIN! HE MAY BE HURT! WE SHOULD--
WE'LL SEE TO THAT DOG, MY LADY...

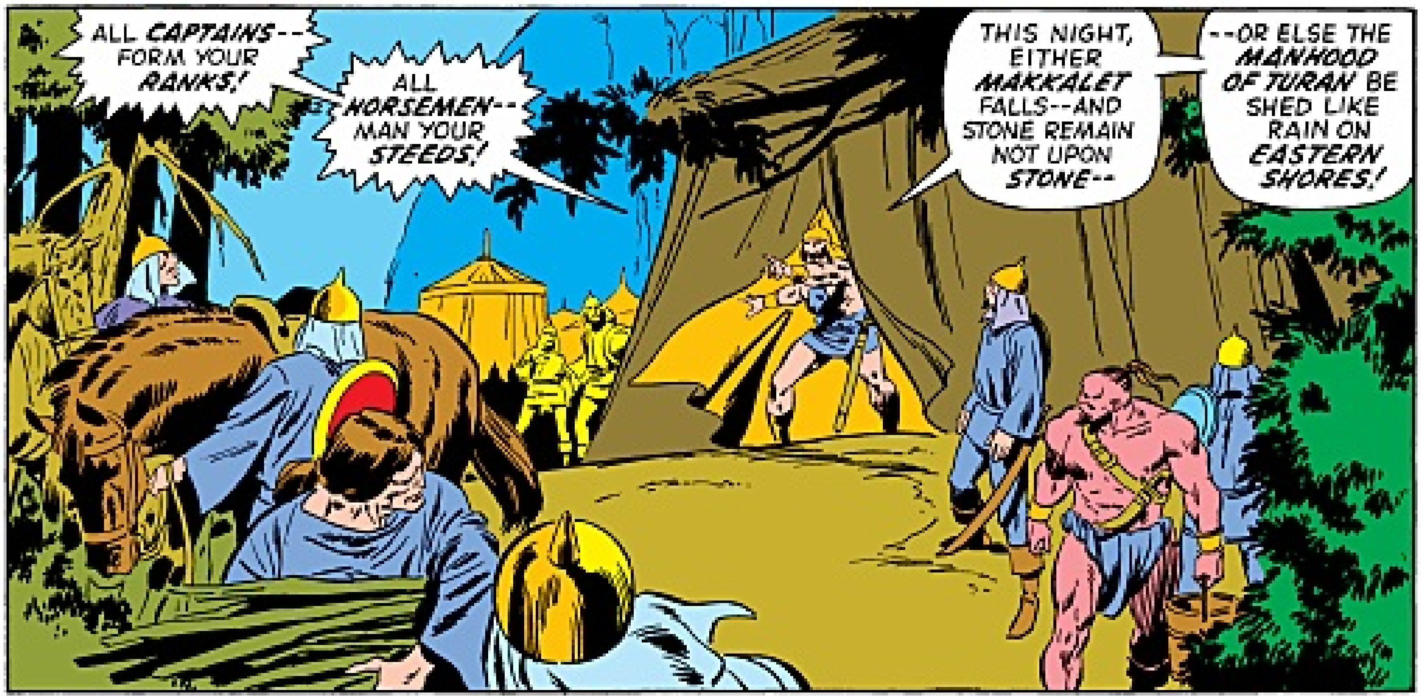

PERHAPS YOU WOULD WISH TO SEE TO HIS MAJESTY...!?
LIKE A DREAMER AWAKENED ABRUPTLY AT CLIFF'S EDGE, MELISSANDRA STARTS, EVEN AS--
MY QUEEN! WHERE...?
I AM HERE, MY HUSBAND!
THANK THE GODS YOU WERE MERELY SENT FLYING, NOT KILLED!
I SHALL BE FINE... ONCE I'VE REGAINED ...MY WIND.
THIS BUT PROVES... WHAT I'VE SAID BEFORE.
YOU MUST FLEE! THE CITY'S UNSAFE FOR YOU... NOW, MORE THAN EVER...!
NO! IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE FOR FLEEING...
...ON THE DAY YOUR HIGH PRIEST PERSUADED YOU TO HAVE THE LIVING TARIM STOLEN FROM HIS TEMPLE IN AGHRAPUR!
WE'LL DISCUSS THIS LATER, MY DEAR... IN PRIVATE. CAPTAIN... HOW CAME THIS MAN SO RUDELY HERE?
WE WERE ESCORTING HIM TO... A CELL, MAJESTY. HE BROKE FREE.
THEN SEE HE DOES NOT DO SO AGAIN!
NOW TAKE HIM AWAY-- AND GOOD RIDDANCE TO HIS UNKEMPT HIDE!
YOU HEARD HIS MAJESTY, LADS. BEND TO IT, NOW!
OFF WITH HIM!
MOMENTS LATER, ALL IS STILL ONCE MORE IN THE NEATLY-TRIMMED GARDENS OF MAKKALET.
YES...
VERY STILL.

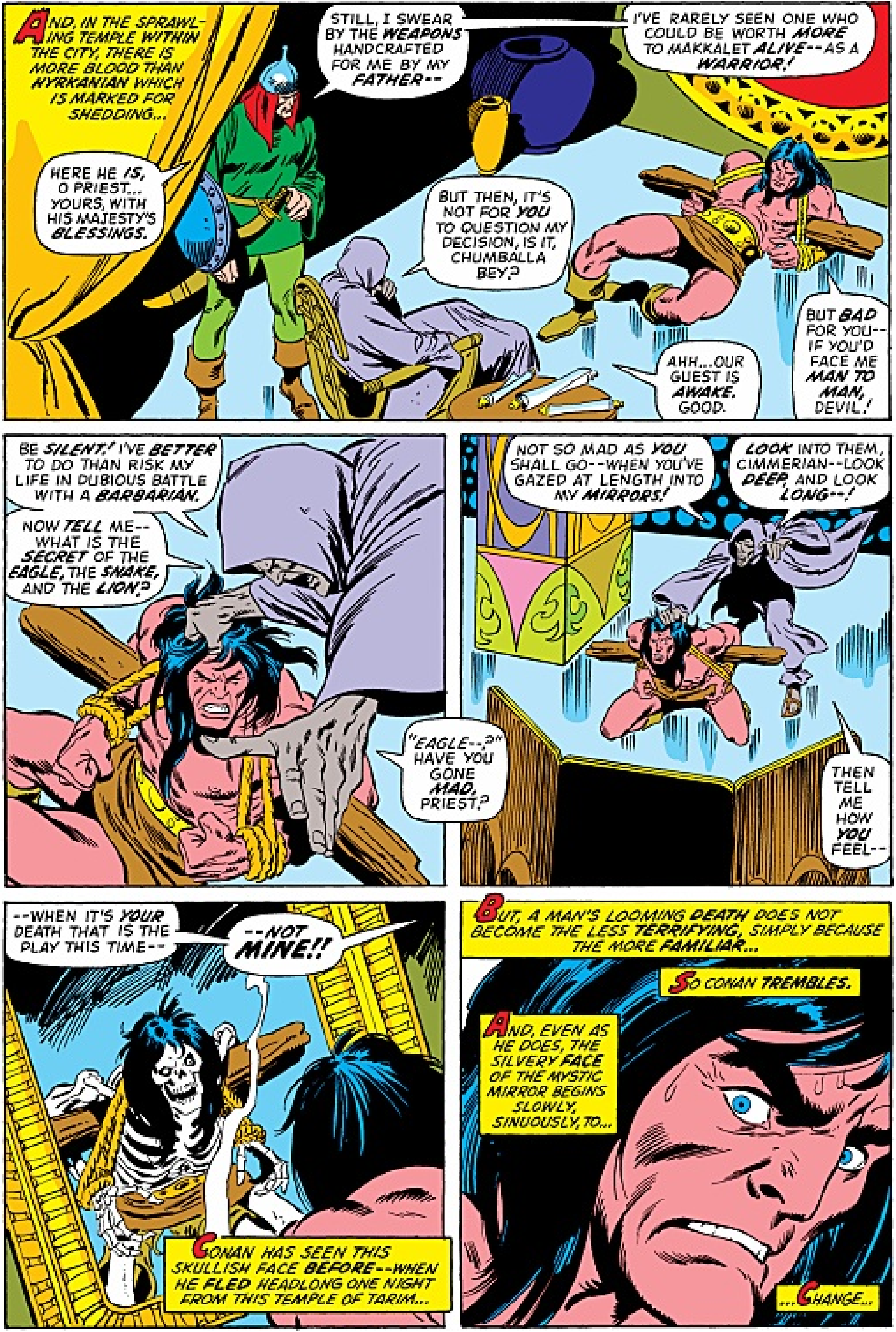

DAWN AND DUSK: TWO TIMES OF DAY, MARKED BY LIGHT AND COLOR SO NIGH THE SAME, YET STRANGELY, SUBTLY DIFFERENT...
...AS ALIKE AND DIFFERENT AS IS THE WAR CAMP OF YEZDIGERD, PRINCE OF ALL TURAN, FROM THE SEEMING SERENITY OF MAKKALET'S PALACE ROYAL.
I WONDER, DEAR SULIMAR, IF THOSE FOOLS DOWN THERE KNOW HOW NEAR THEY STAND TO DOOM.
DOUBTLESS THEY SENSE IT, MY PRINCE... YET FEAR TO SPEAK OF IT.
FOR, NOW THEIR ALLIES FROM PAH-DISHAH HAVE INEXPLICABLY QUIT THE CITY..
...WE'VE FAR MORE MEN TO SCALE THEIR SERPENT-WALL THAN HAVE THEY TO DEFEND IT!
BUT, BEFORE THE FINAL ASSAULT MAY BEGIN, THE AUGURS ARE WAITING, O PRINCE...
THE AUGURS! PURVEYORS OF MUMBO-JUMBO, RATHER!
I PUT LITTLE TRUST IN GODS OR THEIR LACKEYS.
NOR DO I, MY PRINCE... NOR DO I.
STILL, IT'S SAID THERE ARE SOME AMONG YOUR SOLDIERY... PERHAPS EVEN AMONG YOUR PRIESTHOOD... WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY.
AND, SUCH AS THESE CARE MORE ABOUT THE RESTORATION OF THE LIVING TARIM TO HIS RIGHTFUL TEMPLE IN AGHRAPUR...
...THAN WHETHER YOUR FATHER'S COFFERS ARE FILLED WITH EASTERN GOLD.
BUT, HUSH...
HEAR AND HEED US, O SACRED TARIM...
THOU WHO ART INCARNATE IN THE MAN-GOD SPIRITED AWAY BY THE MAKKALET DEVILS...
ACCEPT THIS SACRIFICE, AND GIVE US A SIGN, IF THIS BE TRULY THE HOUR OF THE GRIFFIN...
...THAT HOUR WHEN THE VICTORY OF SWORDS SHALL BE OURS!
THOSE MUMMERS HAD BEST CAST FAVORABLE RUNES...
OR THERE'LL BE MORE THAN FATTED CALVES UPON THIS TWILIGHT'S ALTAR!
THEY HAVE BEEN SO ADVISED, MY PRINCE.
LISTEN WELL...!

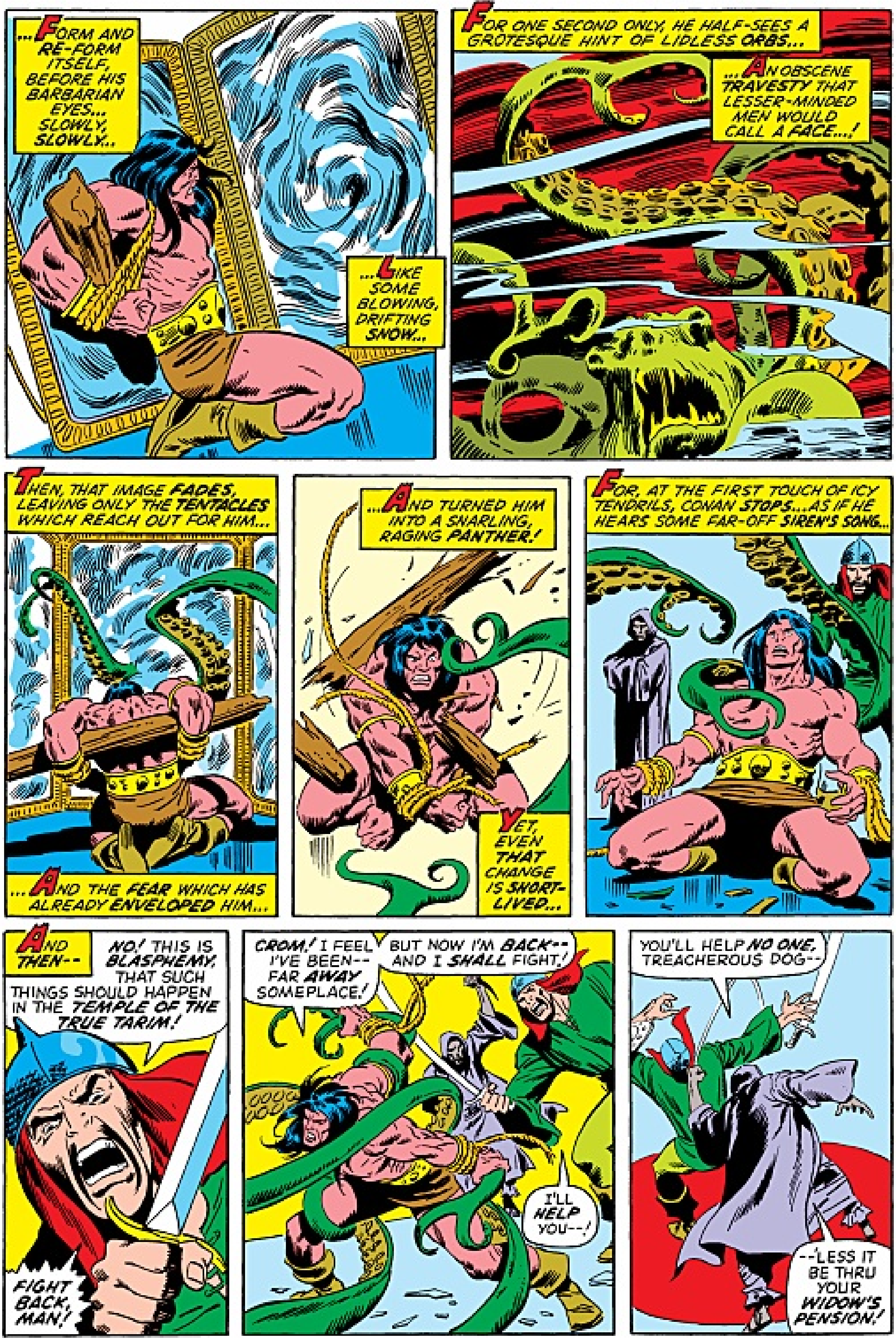

SEE HOW THE ENTRAILS ARE CLOVEN, BRETHREN-- AND HOW THE BLOOD DOES THICKEN WITH PRETER-NATURAL SPEED!
IN SUCH WAYS THE MESSAGES OF THE GODS ARE WRITTEN!

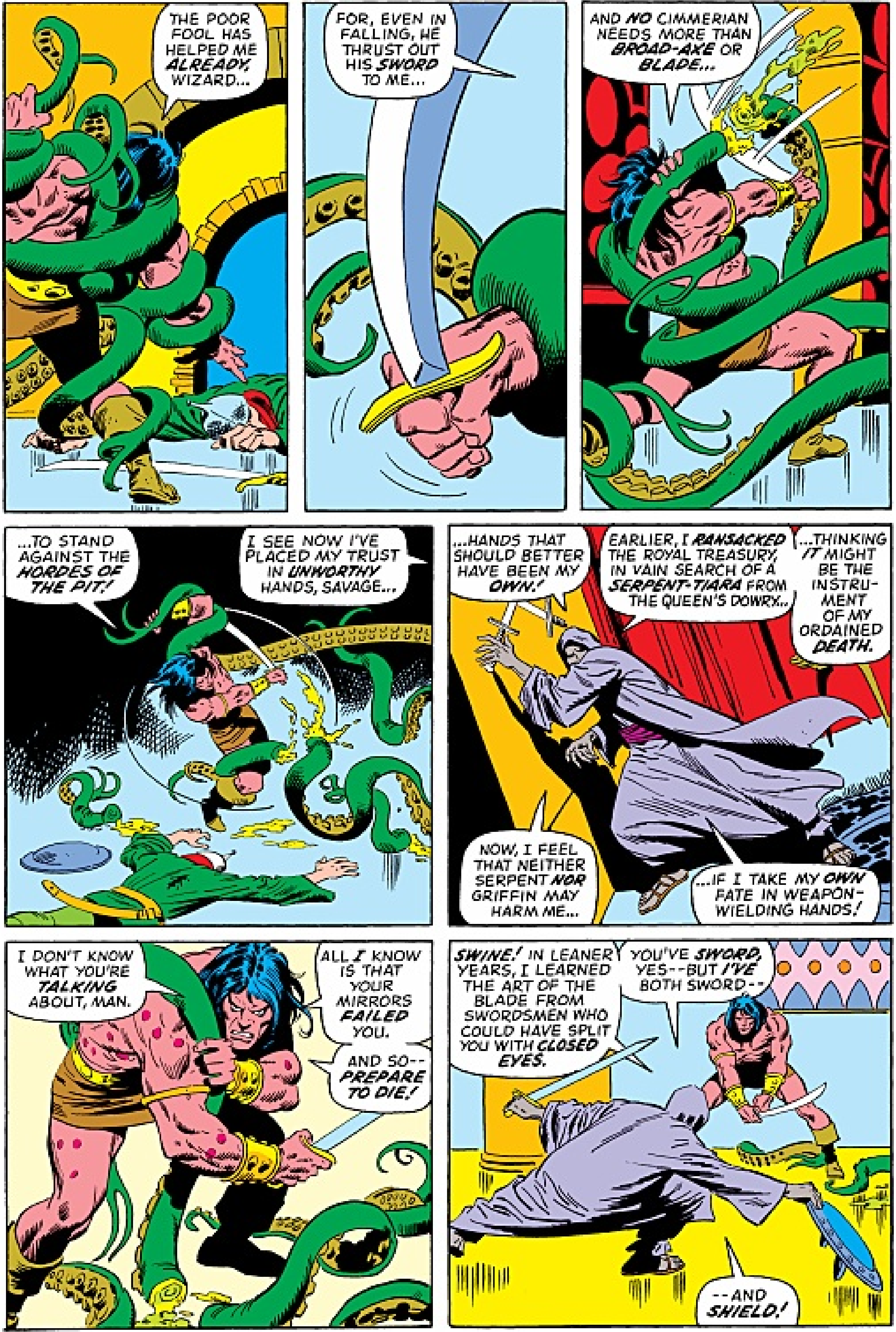

WE HAVE RECEIVED A SIGN, O PRINCE... FROM THE TARIM WHICH IS THE HEAVENLY COUNTER-PART OF THE CAPTIVE MAN-GOD!
THE GRIFFIN SHALL BITE THE SERPENT IN TWAIN--WHEN THE HORSE SPAWNS WALKING SWORDS!
WHAT GIBBERISH IS THIS?
THE GRIFFIN IS TURAN, YES... THE SERPENT, MAKKALET... BUT A HORSE? WALKING SWORDS?
A MERE EMBEL-LISHMENT, MY LORD... NOTHING MORE.
THESE PRIESTS ARE PROUD OF THEIR ART.

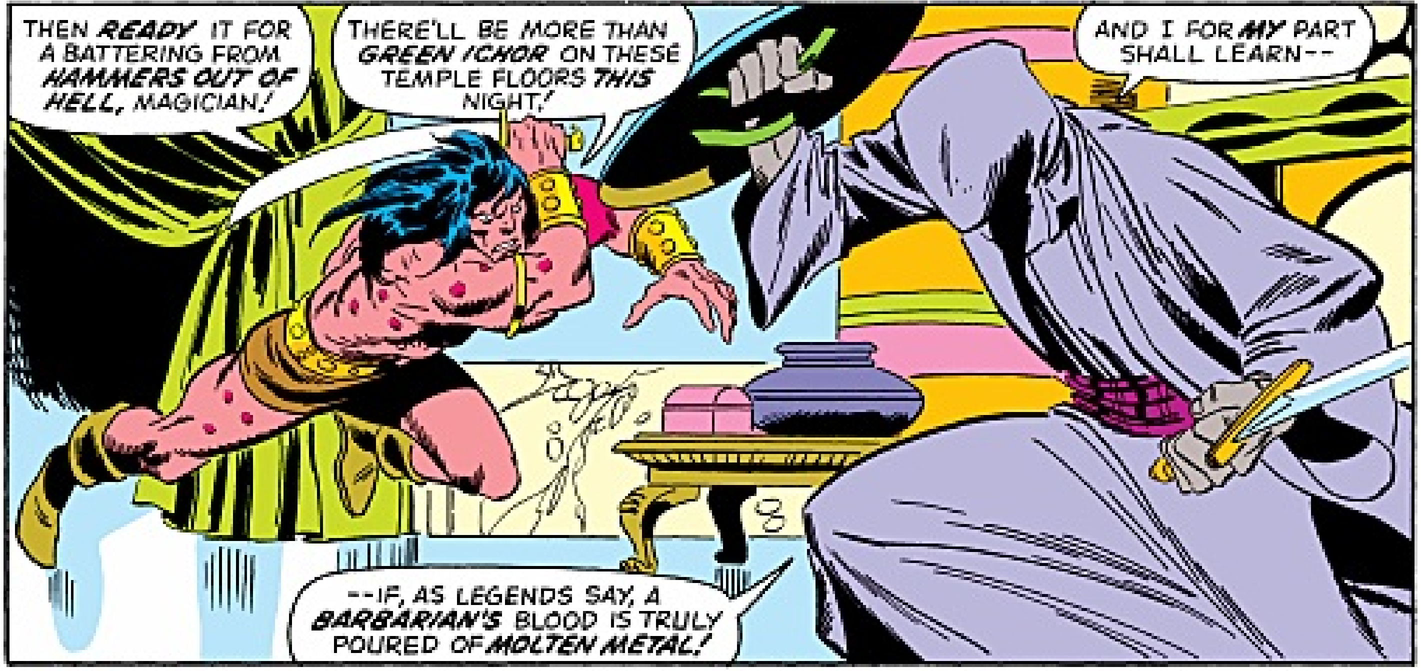

WHAT MATTERS MOST IS THAT THE WORD SHALL SPREAD QUICKLY AMONG YOUR TROOPS... AND FIRE THE MEANEST OF THEM WITH THE BREATH OF DRAGONS!
SURELY THEN, THE HOUR IS COME TO STRIKE!
SO IT WOULD SEEM, SO IT WOULD SEEM.
DONE, THEN! WE'LL RISK OUR ALL-- IN ONE FINAL, FURIOUS ASSAULT!

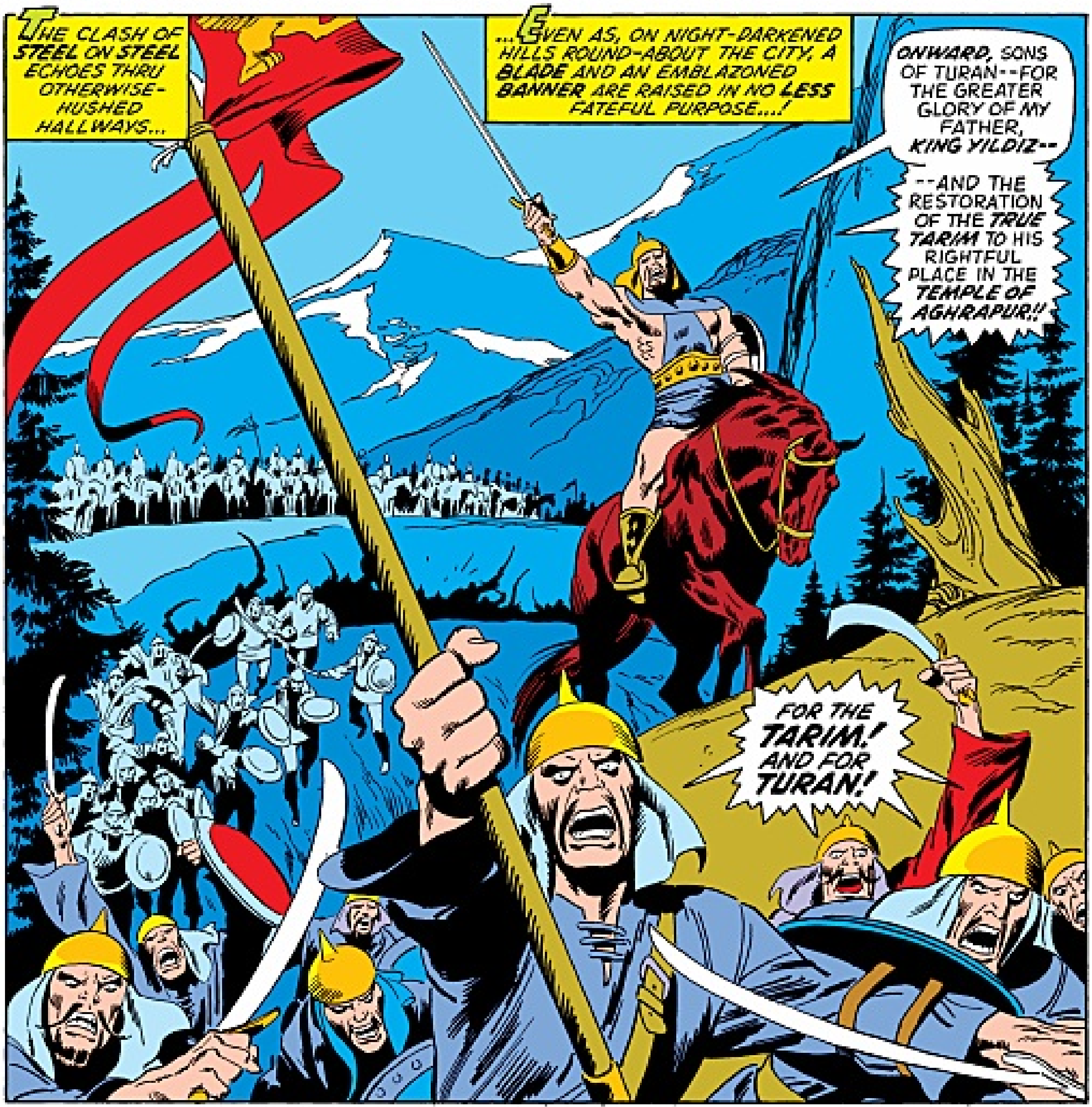

ALL CAPTAINS-- FORM YOUR RANKS!
ALL HORSEMEN-- MAN YOUR STEEDS!
THIS NIGHT, EITHER MAKKALET FALLS--AND STONE REMAIN NOT UPON STONE--
--OR ELSE THE MANHOOD OF TURAN BE SHED LIKE RAIN ON EASTERN SHORES!

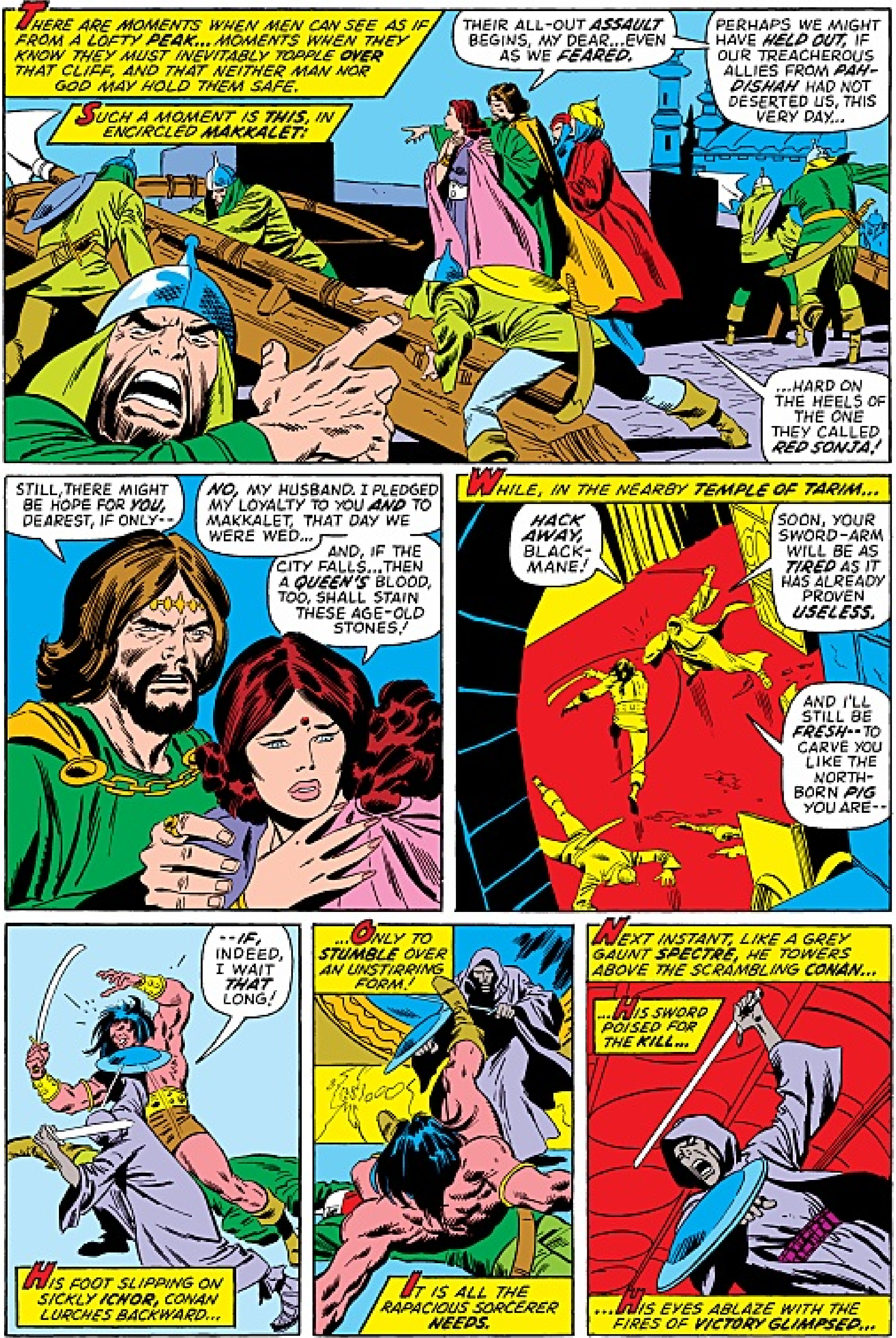

And, in the sprawling temple within the city, there is more blood than Hyrkanian which is marked for shedding...
Still, I swear by the weapons handcrafted for me by my father--
--I've rarely seen one who could be worth more to Makkalet alive--as a warrior!
Here he is, O priest... yours, with his majesty's blessings.
But then, it's not for you to question my decision, is it, Chumballa Bey?
Ahh...our guest is awake. Good.
But bad for you--if you'd face me man to man, devil!
Be silent! I've better to do than risk my life in dubious battle with a barbarian.
Now tell me--what is the secret of the eagle, the snake, and the lion?
"Eagle--?" Have you gone mad, priest?
Not so mad as you shall go--when you've gazed at length into my mirrors!
Look into them, Cimmerian--look deep, and look long--!
Then tell me how you feel--
--when it's your death that is the play this time--
--not mine!!
Conan has seen this skullish face before--when he fled headlong one night from this temple of Tarim...
But, a man's looming death does not become the less terrifying, simply because the more familiar...
So Conan trembles.
And, even as he does, the silvery face of the mystic mirror begins slowly, sinuously, to...
...change...

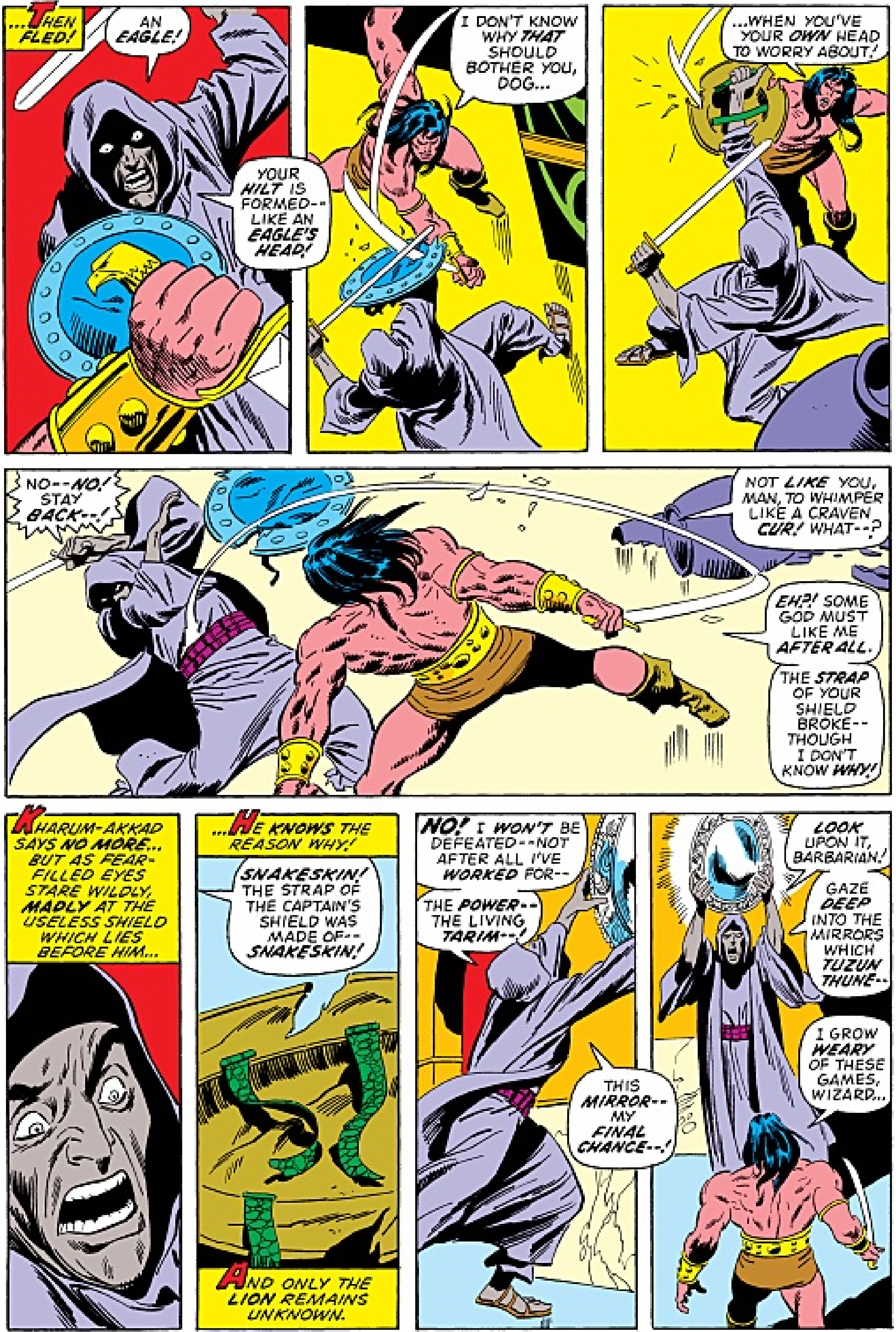

...FORM AND RE-FORM ITSELF, BEFORE HIS BARBARIAN EYES... SLOWLY, SLOWLY...
...LIKE SOME BLOWING, DRIFTING SNOW...
FOR ONE SECOND ONLY, HE HALF-SEES A GROTESQUE HINT OF LIDLESS ORBS...
...AN OBSCENE TRAVESTY THAT LESSER-MINDED MEN WOULD CALL A FACE...!
THEN, THAT IMAGE FADES, LEAVING ONLY THE TENTACLES WHICH REACH OUT FOR HIM...
...AND THE FEAR WHICH HAS ALREADY ENVELOPED HIM...
...AND TURNED HIM INTO A SNARLING, RAGING PANTHER!
YET, EVEN THAT CHANGE IS SHORT-LIVED...
FOR, AT THE FIRST TOUCH OF ICY TENDRILS, CONAN STOPS...AS IF HE HEARS SOME FAR-OFF SIREN'S SONG...
AND THEN--
NO! THIS IS BLASPHEMY, THAT SUCH THINGS SHOULD HAPPEN IN THE TEMPLE OF THE TRUE TARIM!
FIGHT BACK, MAN!
CROM! I FEEL I'VE BEEN-- FAR AWAY SOMEPLACE!
BUT NOW I'M BACK-- AND I SHALL FIGHT!
I'LL HELP YOU--!
YOU'LL HELP NO ONE, TREACHEROUS DOG--
--LESS IT BE THRU YOUR WIDOW'S PENSION!

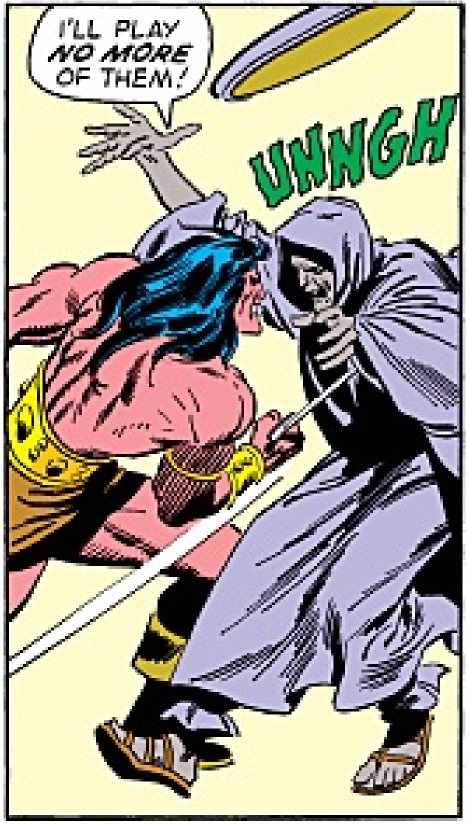

THE POOR FOOL HAS HELPED ME *ALREADY*, WIZARD...
FOR, EVEN IN FALLING, HE THRUST OUT HIS *SWORD* TO ME...
AND *NO* CIMMERIAN NEEDS MORE THAN *BROAD-AXE* OR *BLADE*...
...TO STAND AGAINST THE *HORDES OF THE PIT!*
I SEE NOW I'VE PLACED MY TRUST IN *UNWORTHY* HANDS, SAVAGE...
...HANDS THAT SHOULD BETTER HAVE BEEN MY *OWN!*
EARLIER, I *RANSACKED* THE ROYAL TREASURY, IN VAIN SEARCH OF A *SERPENT-TIARA* FROM THE QUEEN'S DOWRY...
...THINKING *IT* MIGHT BE THE INSTRU-MENT OF MY ORDAINED *DEATH.*
NOW, I FEEL THAT NEITHER SERPENT *NOR* GRIFFIN MAY HARM ME...
...IF I TAKE MY *OWN* FATE IN WEAPON-WIELDING HANDS!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE *TALKING* ABOUT, MAN.
ALL *I* KNOW IS THAT YOUR MIRRORS *FAILED* YOU.
AND SO-- *PREPARE TO DIE!*
SWINE! IN LEANER YEARS, I LEARNED THE ART OF THE BLADE FROM SWORDSMEN WHO COULD HAVE SPLIT YOU WITH *CLOSED EYES.*
YOU'VE *SWORD*, YES--BUT *I'VE* BOTH SWORD--
--AND *SHIELD!*

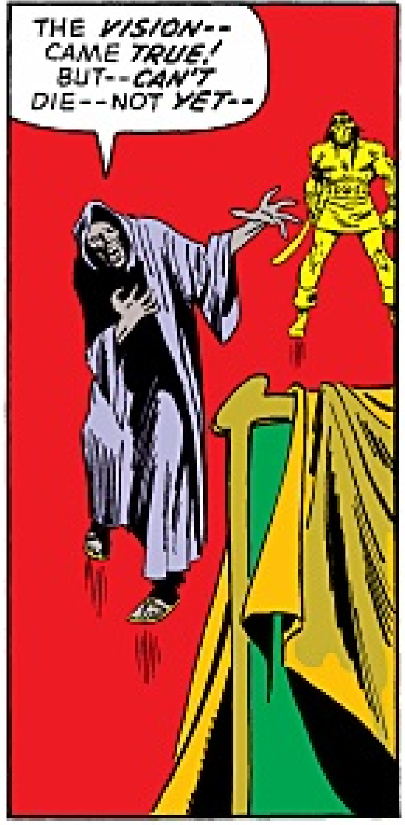

THEN *READY* IT FOR A BATTERING FROM *HAMMERS OUT OF HELL,* MAGICIAN!
THERE'LL BE MORE THAN *GREEN ICHOR* ON THESE TEMPLE FLOORS *THIS* NIGHT!
AND I FOR *MY* PART SHALL LEARN--
--IF, AS LEGENDS SAY, A *BARBARIAN'S* BLOOD IS TRULY POURED OF *MOLTEN METAL!*

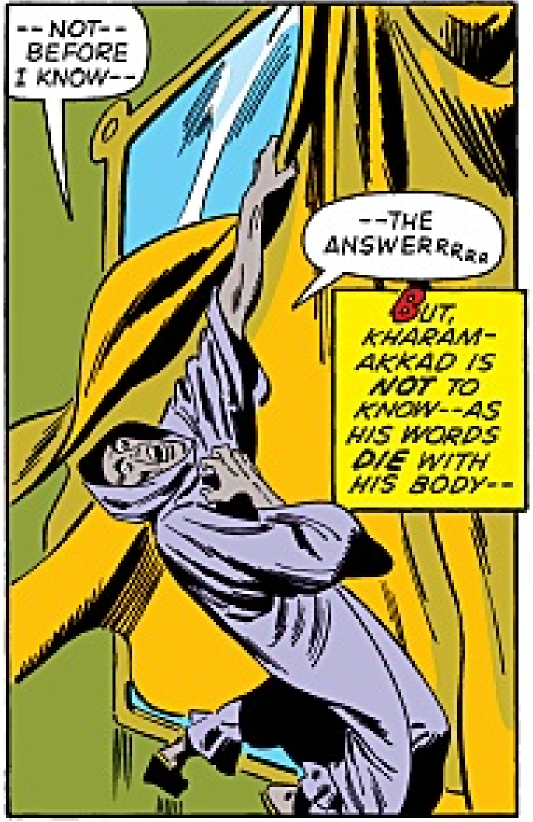

THE CLASH OF *STEEL ON STEEL* ECHOES THRU OTHERWISE-HUSHED HALLWAYS...
...EVEN AS, ON NIGHT-DARKENED HILLS ROUND-ABOUT THE CITY, A *BLADE* AND AN EMBLAZONED *BANNER* ARE RAISED IN NO *LESS* FATEFUL PURPOSE...!
ONWARD, SONS OF TURAN--FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF MY FATHER, *KING YILDIZ*--
--AND THE RESTORATION OF THE *TRUE TARIM* TO HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN THE *TEMPLE OF AGHRAPUR!!*
FOR THE *TARIM!* AND FOR *TURAN!*

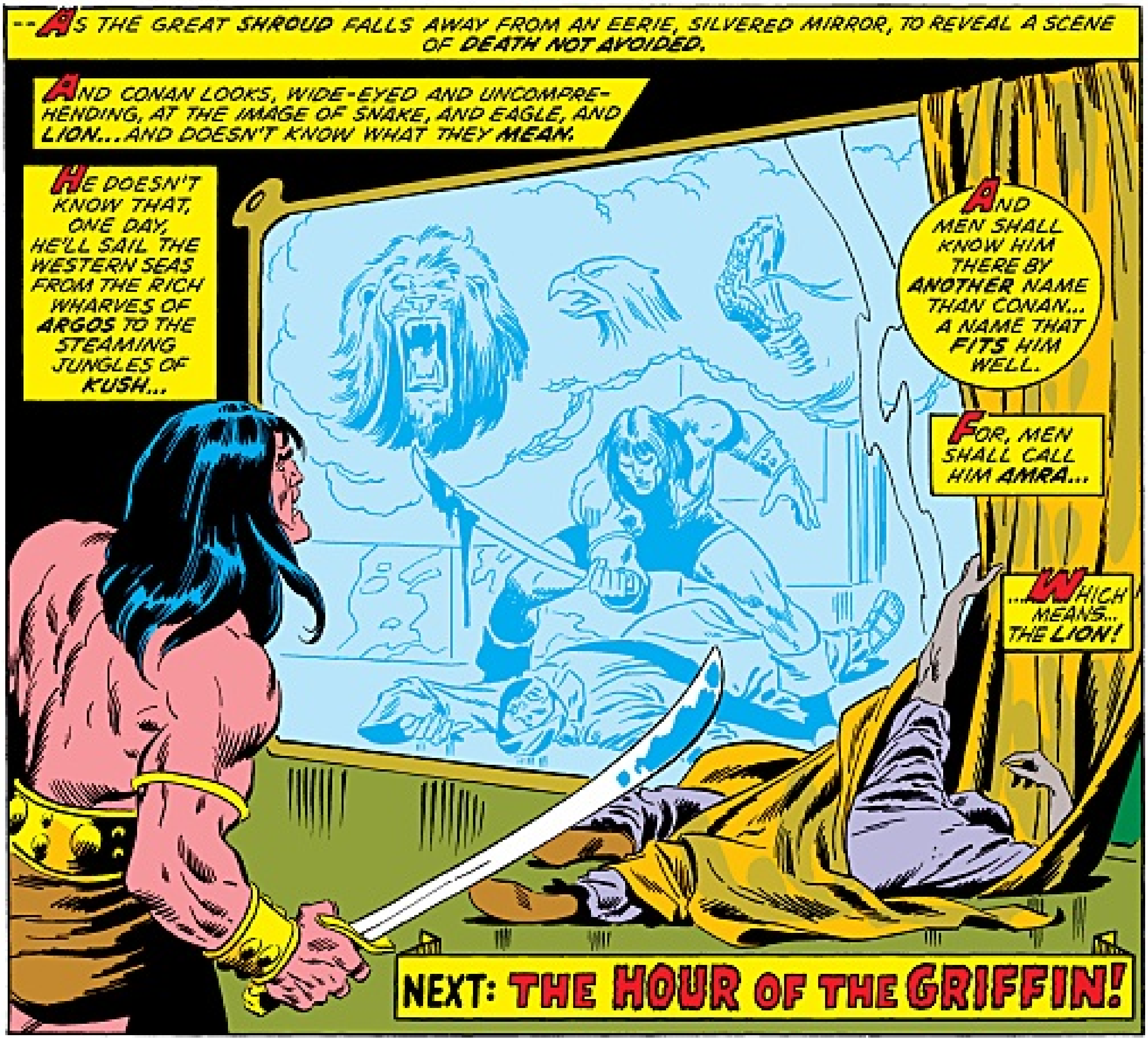

THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN MEN CAN SEE AS IF FROM A LOFTY PEAK... MOMENTS WHEN THEY KNOW THEY MUST INEVITABLY TOPPLE OVER THAT CLIFF, AND THAT NEITHER MAN NOR GOD MAY HOLD THEM SAFE.
SUCH A MOMENT IS THIS, IN ENCIRCLED MAKKALET:
THEIR ALL-OUT ASSAULT BEGINS, MY DEAR... EVEN AS WE FEARED.
PERHAPS WE MIGHT HAVE HELD OUT, IF OUR TREACHEROUS ALLIES FROM PAHDISHAH HAD NOT DESERTED US, THIS VERY DAY...
...HARD ON THE HEELS OF THE ONE THEY CALLED RED SONJA!
STILL, THERE MIGHT BE HOPE FOR YOU, DEAREST, IF ONLY--
NO, MY HUSBAND. I PLEDGED MY LOYALTY TO YOU AND TO MAKKALET, THAT DAY WE WERE WED...
AND, IF THE CITY FALLS... THEN A QUEEN'S BLOOD, TOO, SHALL STAIN THESE AGE-OLD STONES!
WHILE, IN THE NEARBY TEMPLE OF TARIM...
HACK AWAY, BLACK-MANE!
SOON, YOUR SWORD-ARM WILL BE AS TIRED AS IT HAS ALREADY PROVEN USELESS.
AND I'LL STILL BE FRESH--TO CARVE YOU LIKE THE NORTH-BORN PIG YOU ARE--
--IF, INDEED, I WAIT THAT LONG!
HIS FOOT SLIPPING ON SICKLY ICHOR, CONAN LURCHES BACKWARD...
...ONLY TO STUMBLE OVER AN UNSTIRRING FORM!
IT IS ALL THE RAPACIOUS SORCERER NEEDS.
NEXT INSTANT, LIKE A GREY GAUNT SPECTRE, HE TOWERS ABOVE THE SCRAMBLING CONAN...
...HIS SWORD POISED FOR THE KILL...
...HIS EYES ABLAZE WITH THE FIRES OF VICTORY GLIMPSED...

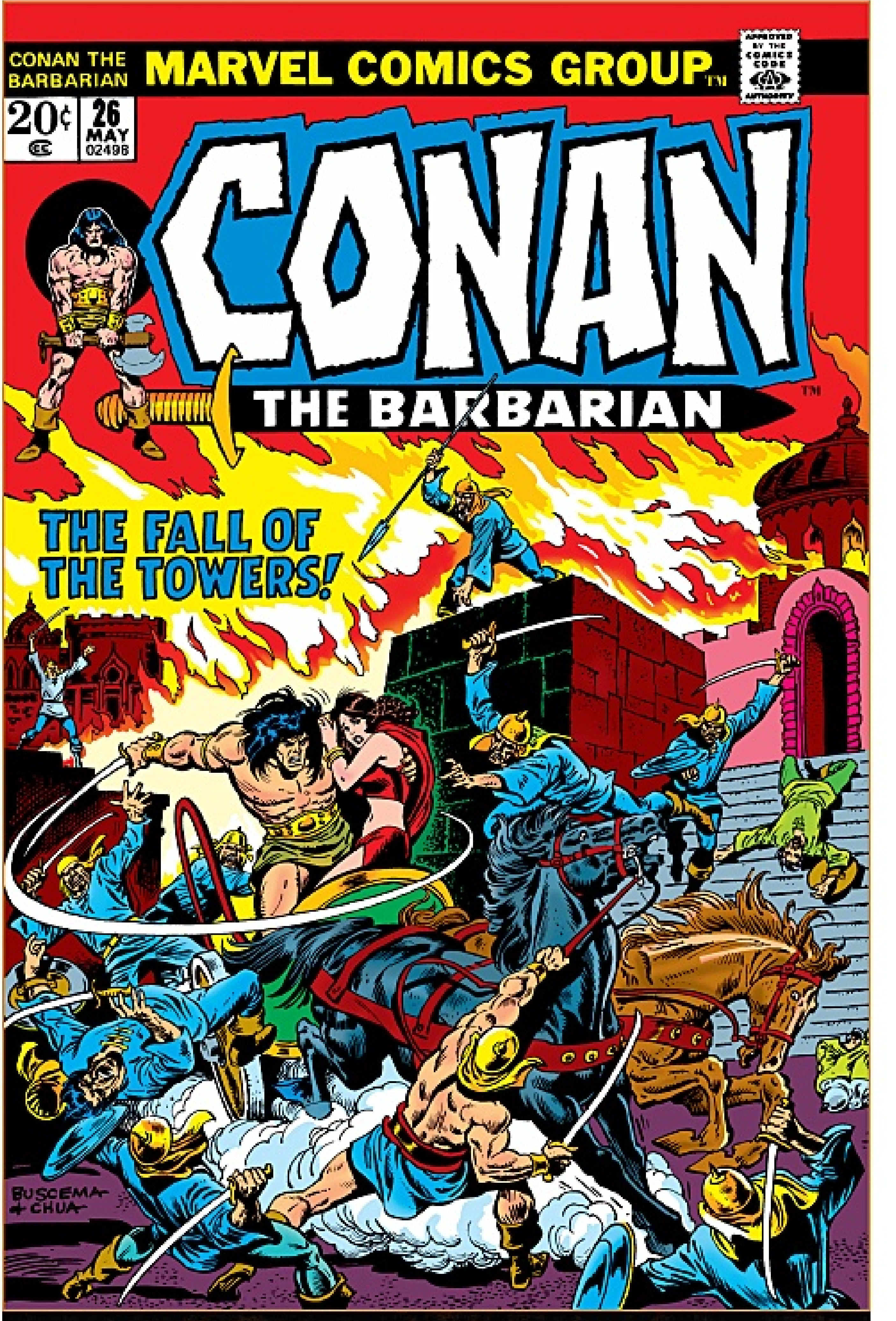

...THEN FLED!
AN EAGLE!
YOUR HILT IS FORMED--LIKE AN EAGLE'S HEAD!
I DON'T KNOW WHY THAT SHOULD BOTHER YOU, DOG...
...WHEN YOU'VE YOUR OWN HEAD TO WORRY ABOUT!
NO--NO! STAY BACK--!
NOT LIKE YOU, MAN, TO WHIMPER LIKE A CRAVEN CUR! WHAT--?
EH?! SOME GOD MUST LIKE ME AFTER ALL.
THE STRAP OF YOUR SHIELD BROKE--THOUGH I DON'T KNOW WHY!
KHARUM-AKKAD SAYS NO MORE... BUT AS FEAR-FILLED EYES STARE WILDLY, MADLY AT THE USELESS SHIELD WHICH LIES BEFORE HIM...
...HE KNOWS THE REASON WHY!
SNAKESKIN! THE STRAP OF THE CAPTAIN'S SHIELD WAS MADE OF--SNAKESKIN!
AND ONLY THE LION REMAINS UNKNOWN.
NO! I WON'T BE DEFEATED--NOT AFTER ALL I'VE WORKED FOR--
THE POWER--THE LIVING TARIM--!
THIS MIRROR--MY FINAL CHANCE--!
LOOK UPON IT, BARBARIAN!
GAZE DEEP INTO THE MIRRORS WHICH TUZUN THUNE--
I GROW WEARY OF THESE GAMES, WIZARD...


I'LL PLAY NO MORE OF THEM!
UHNGH


THE VISION-- CAME TRUE! BUT--CAN'T DIE--NOT YET--


--NOT-- BEFORE I KNOW--
--THE ANSWERRRRR
BUT, KHARAM-AKKAD IS NOT TO KNOW--AS HIS WORDS DIE WITH HIS BODY--


--AS THE GREAT SHROUD FALLS AWAY FROM AN EERIE, SILVERED MIRROR, TO REVEAL A SCENE OF DEATH NOT AVOIDED.
AND CONAN LOOKS, WIDE-EYED AND UNCOMPREHENDING, AT THE IMAGE OF SNAKE, AND EAGLE, AND LION...AND DOESN'T KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN.
HE DOESN'T KNOW THAT, ONE DAY, HE'LL SAIL THE WESTERN SEAS FROM THE RICH WHARVES OF ARGOS TO THE STEAMING JUNGLES OF KUSH...
AND MEN SHALL KNOW HIM THERE BY ANOTHER NAME THAN CONAN... A NAME THAT FITS HIM WELL.
FOR, MEN SHALL CALL HIM AMRA...
...WHICH MEANS... THE LION!
NEXT: THE HOUR OF THE GRIFFIN!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THE FALL OF THE TOWERS!
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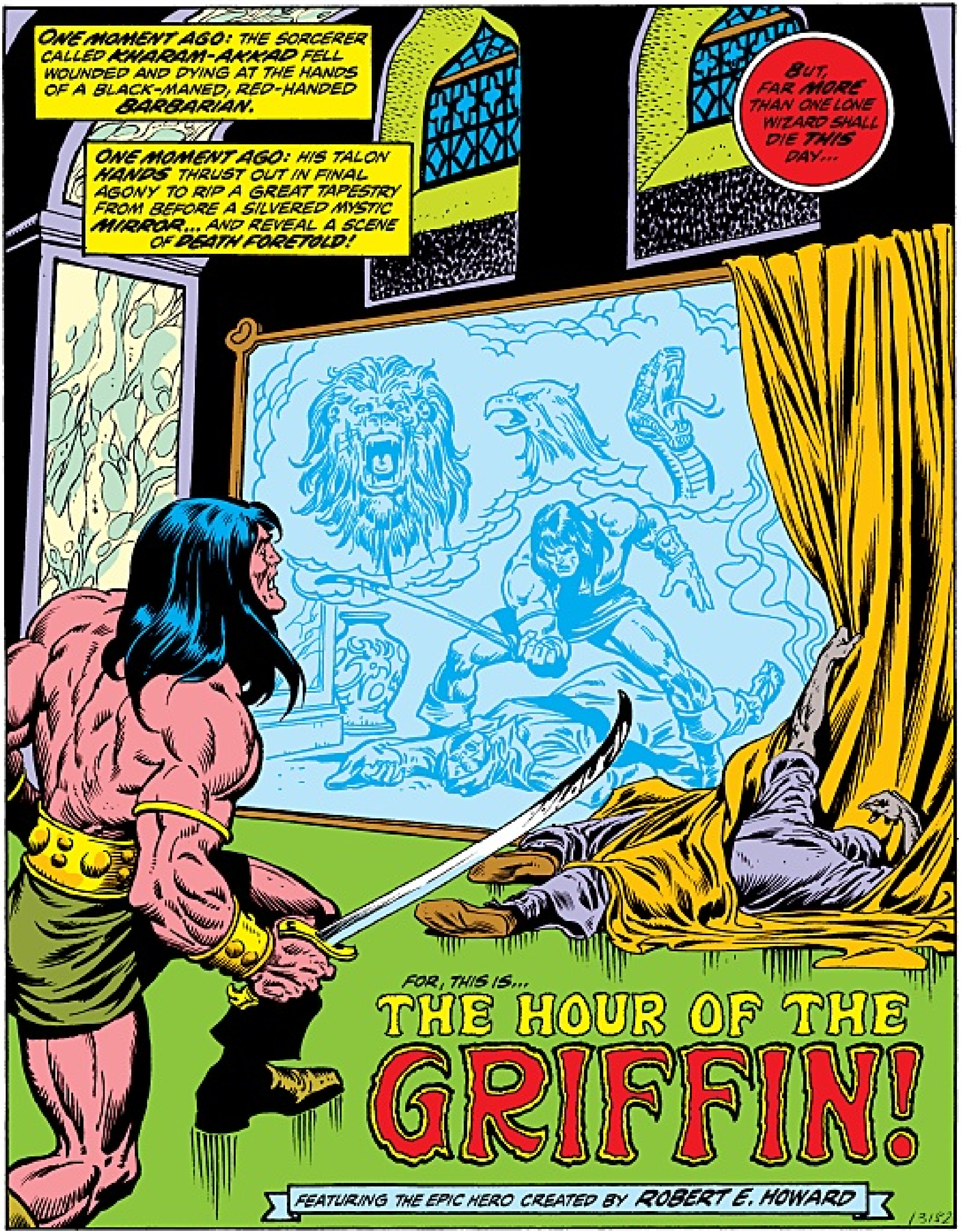

ONE MOMENT AGO: THE SORCERER CALLED KHARAM-AKKAD FELL WOUNDED AND DYING AT THE HANDS OF A BLACK-MANED, RED-HANDED BARBARIAN.
ONE MOMENT AGO: HIS TALON HANDS THRUST OUT IN FINAL AGONY TO RIP A GREAT TAPESTRY FROM BEFORE A SILVERED MYSTIC MIRROR... AND REVEAL A SCENE OF DEATH FORETOLD!
BUT, FAR MORE THAN ONE LONE WIZARD SHALL DIE THIS DAY...
FOR, THIS IS...
THE HOUR OF THE GRIFFIN!
FEATURING THE EPIC HERO CREATED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

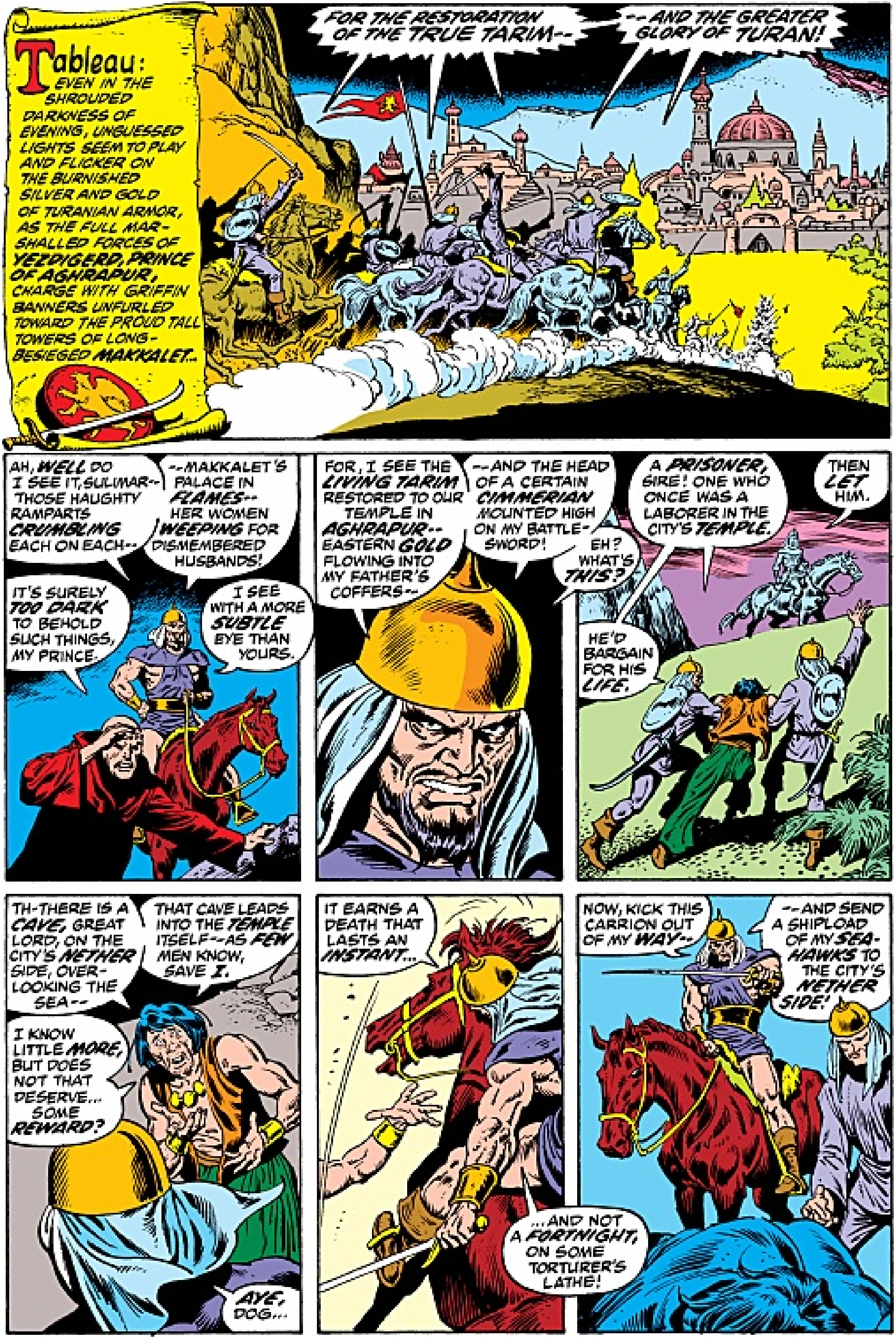


Tableau: Even in the shrouded darkness of evening, unguessed lights seem to play and flicker on the burnished silver and gold of Turanian armor, as the full marshalled forces of YEZDIGERD, PRINCE OF AGHRAPUR, charge with griffin banners unfurled toward the proud tall towers of long-besieged MAKKALET...
FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE TRUE TARIM--
--AND THE GREATER GLORY OF TURAN!
AH, WELL DO I SEE IT, SULIMAR-- THOSE HAUGHTY RAMPARTS CRUMBLING EACH ON EACH--
--MAKKALET'S PALACE IN FLAMES-- HER WOMEN WEEPING FOR DISMEMBERED HUSBANDS!
IT'S SURELY TOO DARK TO BEHOLD SUCH THINGS, MY PRINCE.
I SEE WITH A MORE SUBTLE EYE THAN YOURS.
FOR, I SEE THE LIVING TARIM RESTORED TO OUR TEMPLE IN AGHRAPUR-- EASTERN GOLD FLOWING INTO MY FATHER'S COFFERS--
--AND THE HEAD OF A CERTAIN CIMMERIAN MOUNTED HIGH ON MY BATTLE-SWORD!
EH? WHAT'S THIS?
A PRISONER, SIRE! ONE WHO ONCE WAS A LABORER IN THE CITY'S TEMPLE.
THEN LET HIM.
HE'D BARGAIN FOR HIS LIFE.
TH-THERE IS A CAVE, GREAT LORD, ON THE CITY'S NETHER SIDE, OVERLOOKING THE SEA--
THAT CAVE LEADS INTO THE TEMPLE ITSELF--AS FEW MEN KNOW, SAVE I.
I KNOW LITTLE MORE, BUT DOES NOT THAT DESERVE... SOME REWARD?
AYE, DOG...
IT EARNS A DEATH THAT LASTS AN INSTANT...
...AND NOT A FORTNIGHT, ON SOME TORTURER'S LATHE!
NOW, KICK THIS CARRION OUT OF MY WAY--
--AND SEND A SHIPLOAD OF MY SEA-HAWKS TO THE CITY'S NETHER SIDE!

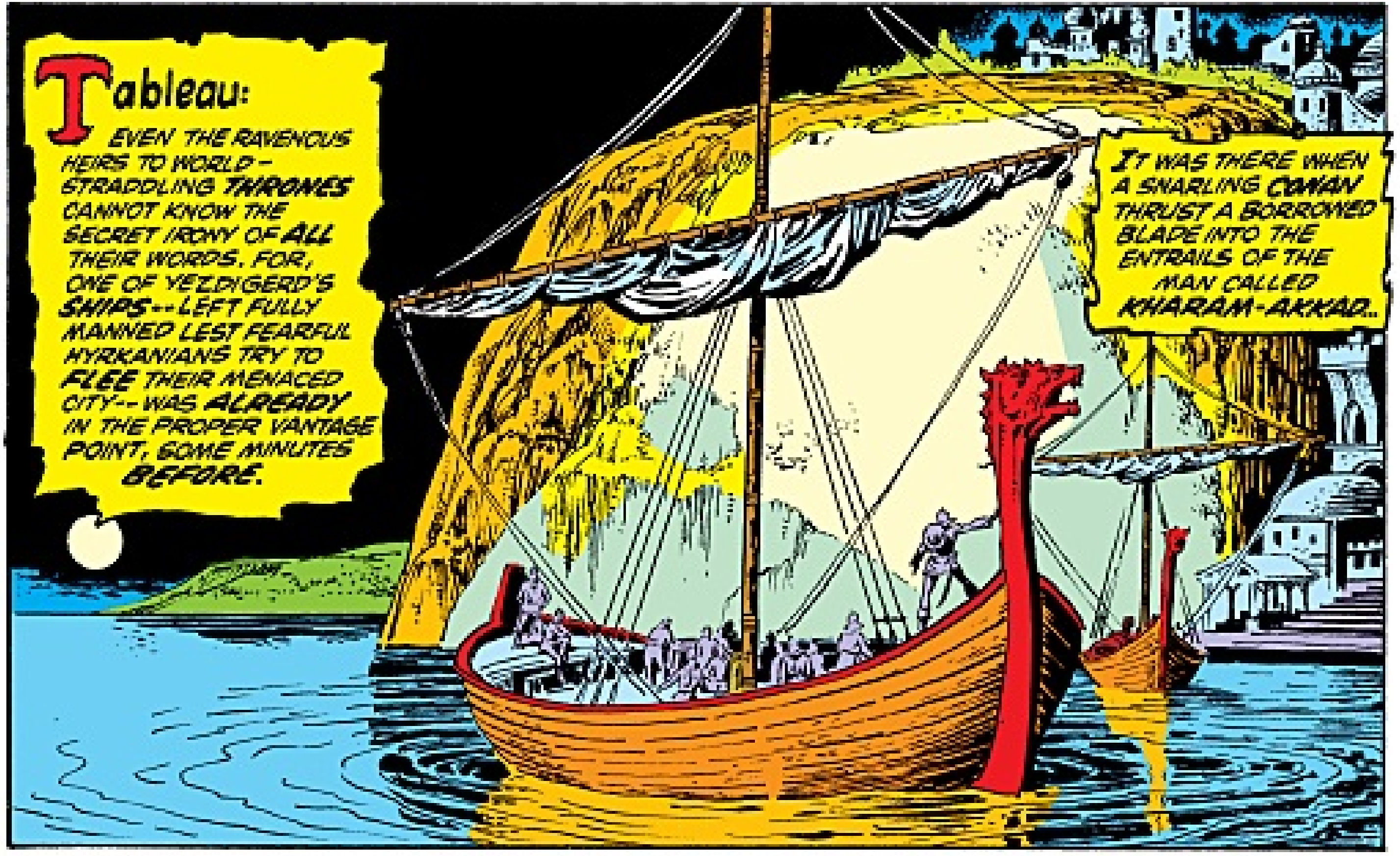
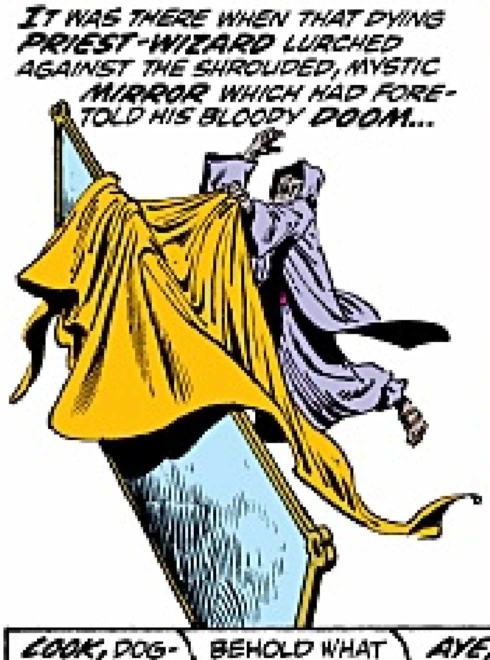
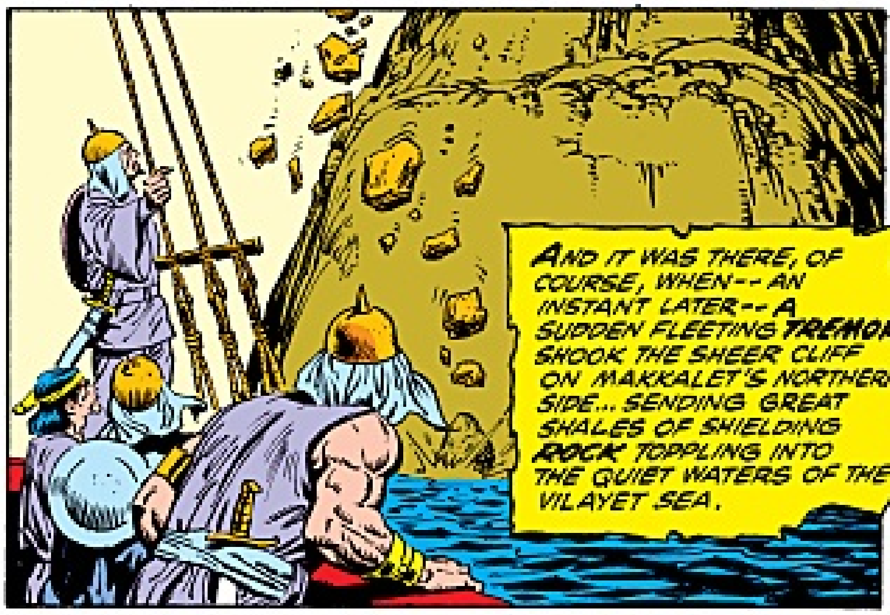
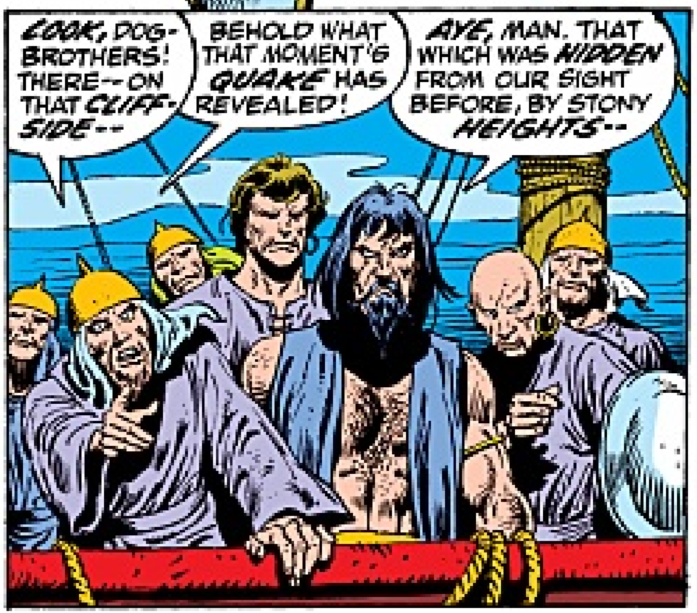
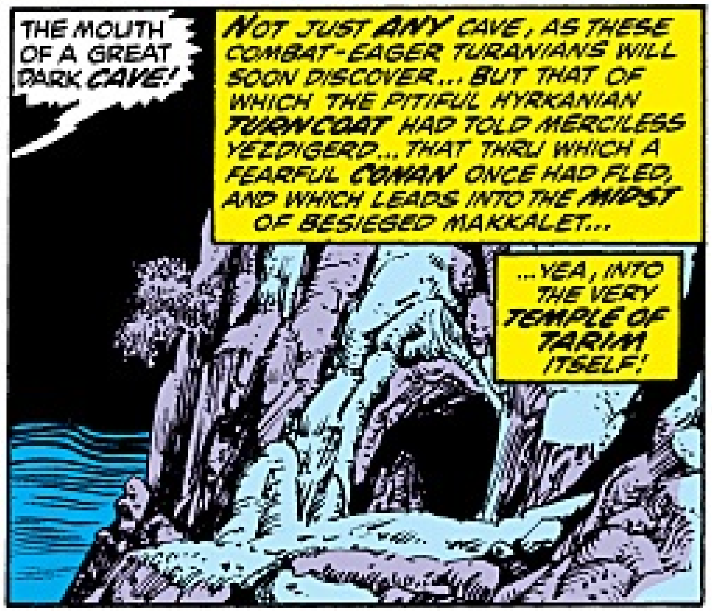


Tableau:
EVEN THE RAVENOUS HEIRS TO WORLD-STRADDLING THRONES CANNOT KNOW THE SECRET IRONY OF ALL THEIR WORDS. FOR, ONE OF YEZDIGERD'S SHIPS--LEFT FULLY MANNED LEST FEARFUL HYRKANIANS TRY TO FLEE THEIR MENACED CITY--WAS ALREADY IN THE PROPER VANTAGE POINT, SOME MINUTES BEFORE.
IT WAS THERE WHEN A SNARLING CONAN THRUST A BORROWED BLADE INTO THE ENTRAILS OF THE MAN CALLED KHARAM-AKKAD..


IT WAS THERE WHEN THAT DYING PRIEST-WIZARD LURCHED AGAINST THE SHROUDED, MYSTIC MIRROR WHICH HAD FORETOLD HIS BLOODY DOOM...


AND IT WAS THERE, OF COURSE, WHEN--AN INSTANT LATER--A SUDDEN FLEETING TREMOR SHOOK THE SHEER CLIFF ON MAKKALET'S NORTHERN SIDE... SENDING GREAT SHALES OF SHIELDING ROCK TOPPLING INTO THE QUIET WATERS OF THE VILAYET SEA.


LOOK, DOG-BROTHERS! THERE--ON THAT CLIFF-SIDE--
BEHOLD WHAT THAT MOMENT'S QUAKE HAS REVEALED!
AYE, MAN. THAT WHICH WAS HIDDEN FROM OUR SIGHT BEFORE, BY STONY HEIGHTS--


THE MOUTH OF A GREAT DARK CAVE!
NOT JUST ANY CAVE, AS THESE COMBAT-EAGER TURANIANS WILL SOON DISCOVER... BUT THAT OF WHICH THE PITIFUL HYRKANIAN TURNCOAT HAD TOLD MERCILESS YEZDIGERD... THAT THRU WHICH A FEARFUL CONAN ONCE HAD FLED, AND WHICH LEADS INTO THE MIDST OF BESIEGED MAKKALET...
...YEA, INTO THE VERY TEMPLE OF TARIM ITSELF!

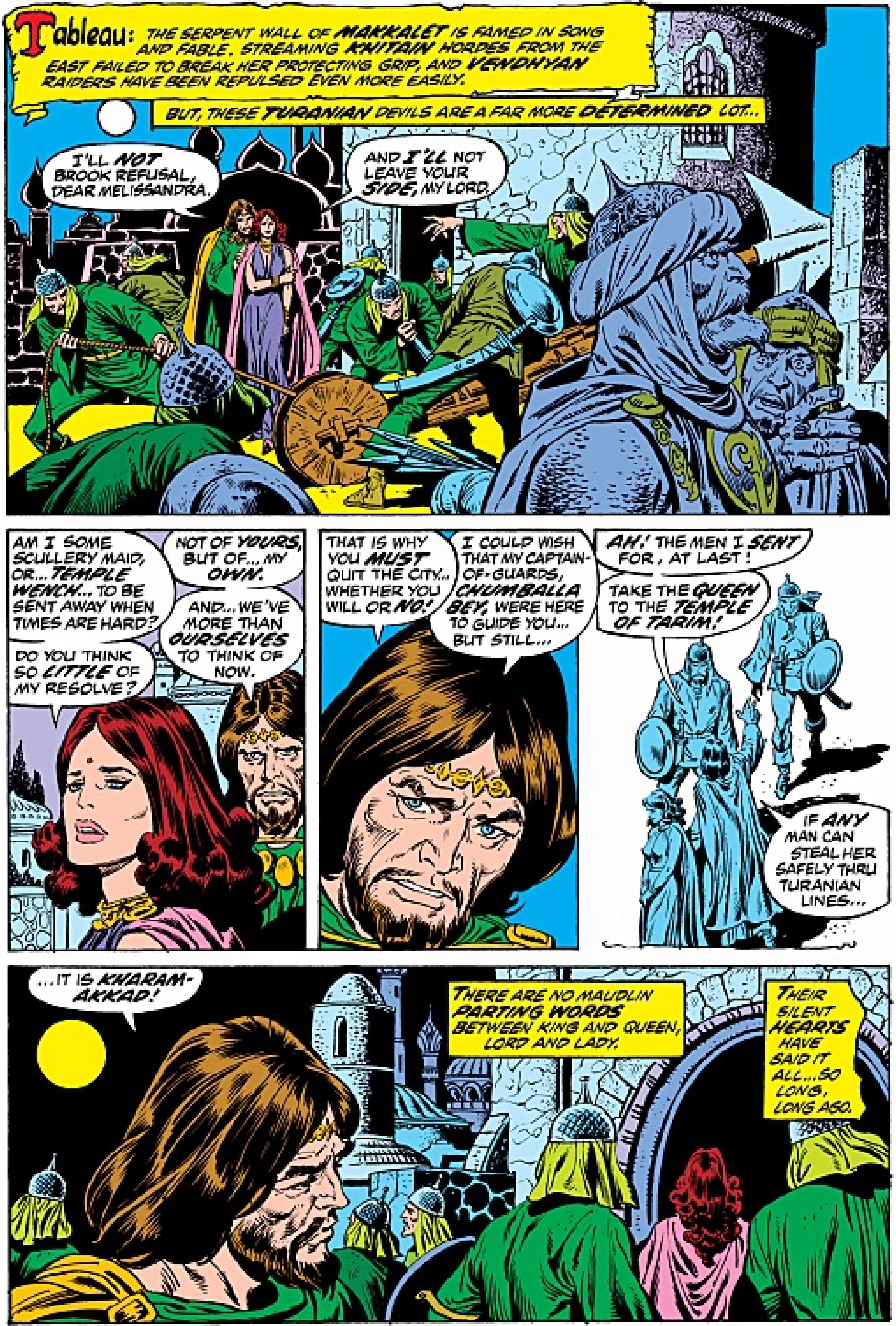


Tableau: THE SERPENT WALL OF MAKKALET IS FAMED IN SONG AND FABLE. STREAMING KHITAIN HORDES FROM THE EAST FAILED TO BREAK HER PROTECTING GRIP, AND VENDHYAN RAIDERS HAVE BEEN REPULSED EVEN MORE EASILY.
BUT, THESE TURANIAN DEVILS ARE A FAR MORE DETERMINED LOT...
I'LL NOT BROOK REFUSAL, DEAR MELISSANDRA.
AND I'LL NOT LEAVE YOUR SIDE, MY LORD.
AM I SOME SCULLERY MAID, OR... TEMPLE WENCH... TO BE SENT AWAY WHEN TIMES ARE HARD?
DO YOU THINK SO LITTLE OF MY RESOLVE?
NOT OF YOURS, BUT OF... MY OWN.
AND... WE'VE MORE THAN OURSELVES TO THINK OF NOW.
THAT IS WHY YOU MUST QUIT THE CITY... WHETHER YOU WILL OR NO!
I COULD WISH THAT MY CAPTAIN-OF-GUARDS, CHUMBALLA BEY, WERE HERE TO GUIDE YOU... BUT STILL...
AH! THE MEN I SENT FOR, AT LAST!
TAKE THE QUEEN TO THE TEMPLE OF TARIM!
IF ANY MAN CAN STEAL HER SAFELY THRU TURANIAN LINES...
...IT IS KHARAM-AKKAD!
THERE ARE NO MAUDLIN PARTING WORDS BETWEEN KING AND QUEEN, LORD AND LADY.
THEIR SILENT HEARTS HAVE SAID IT ALL... SO LONG, LONG AGO.

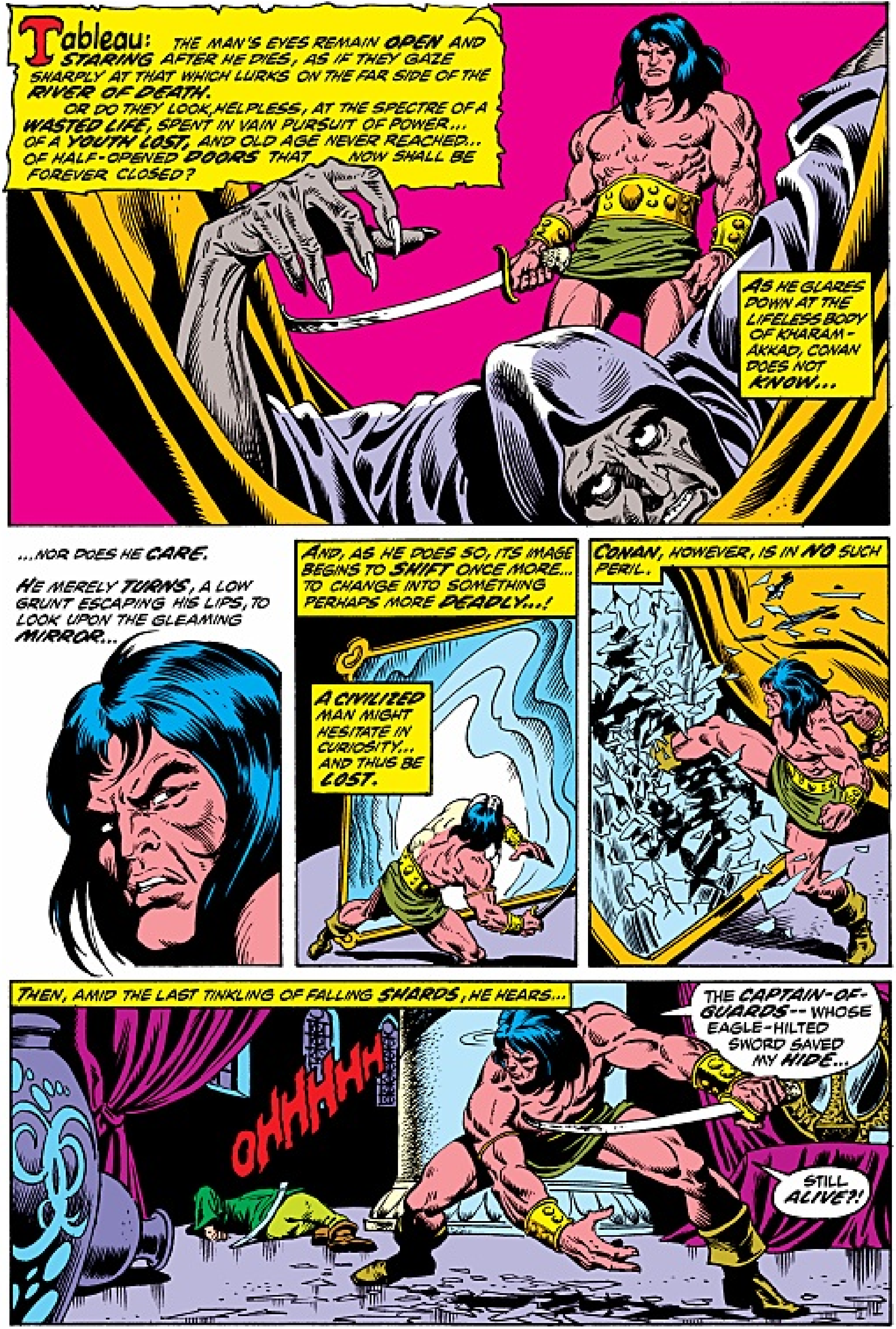
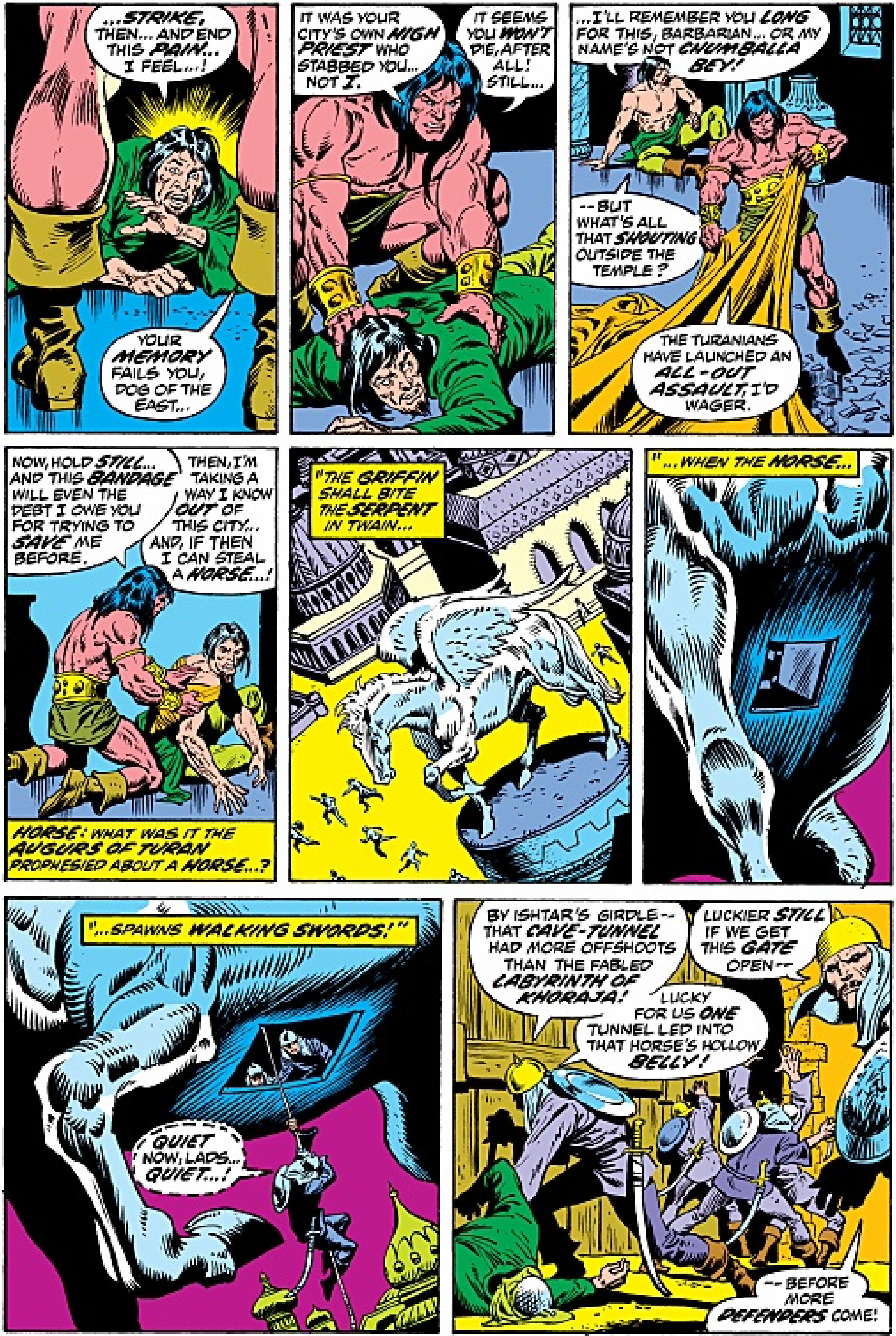
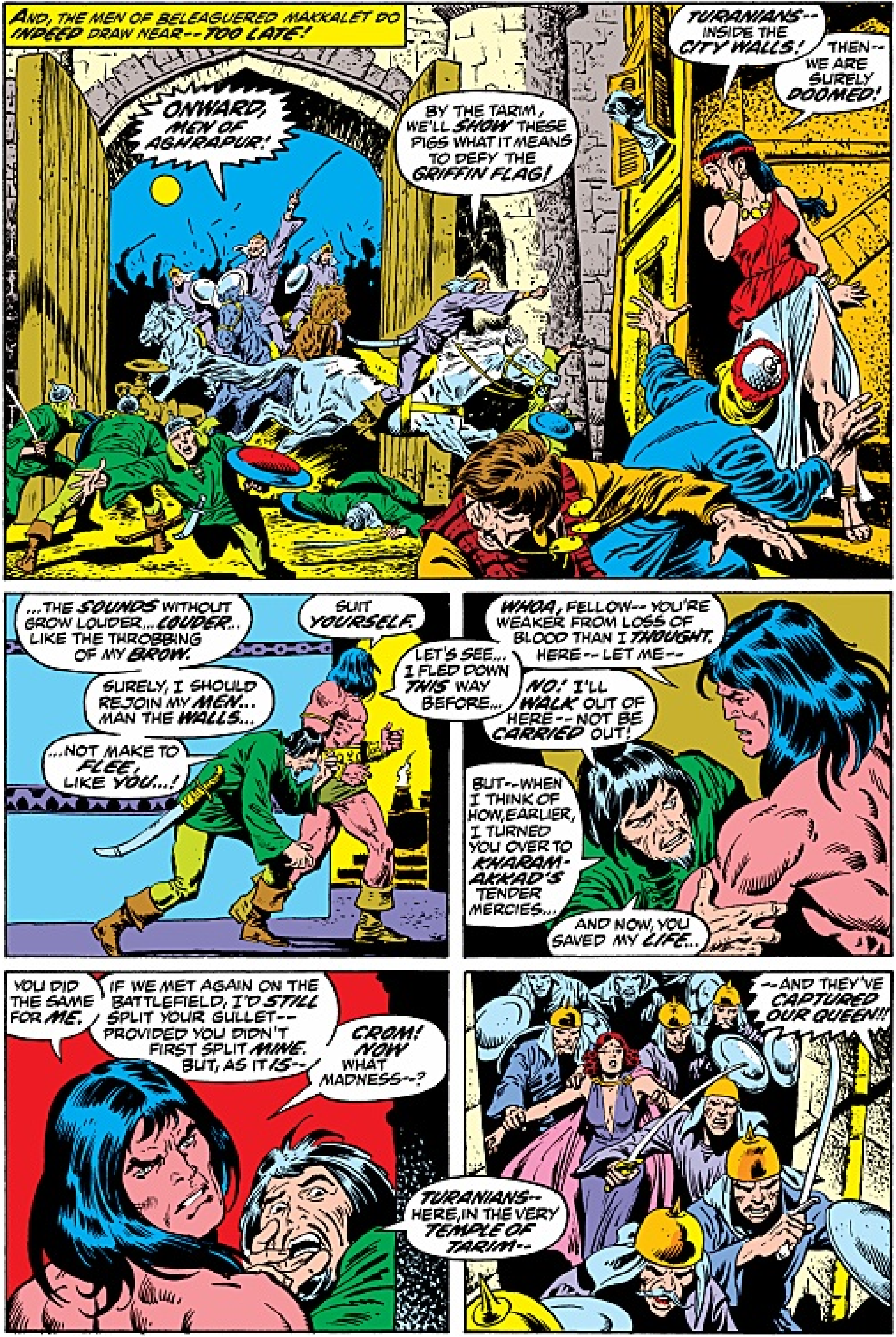
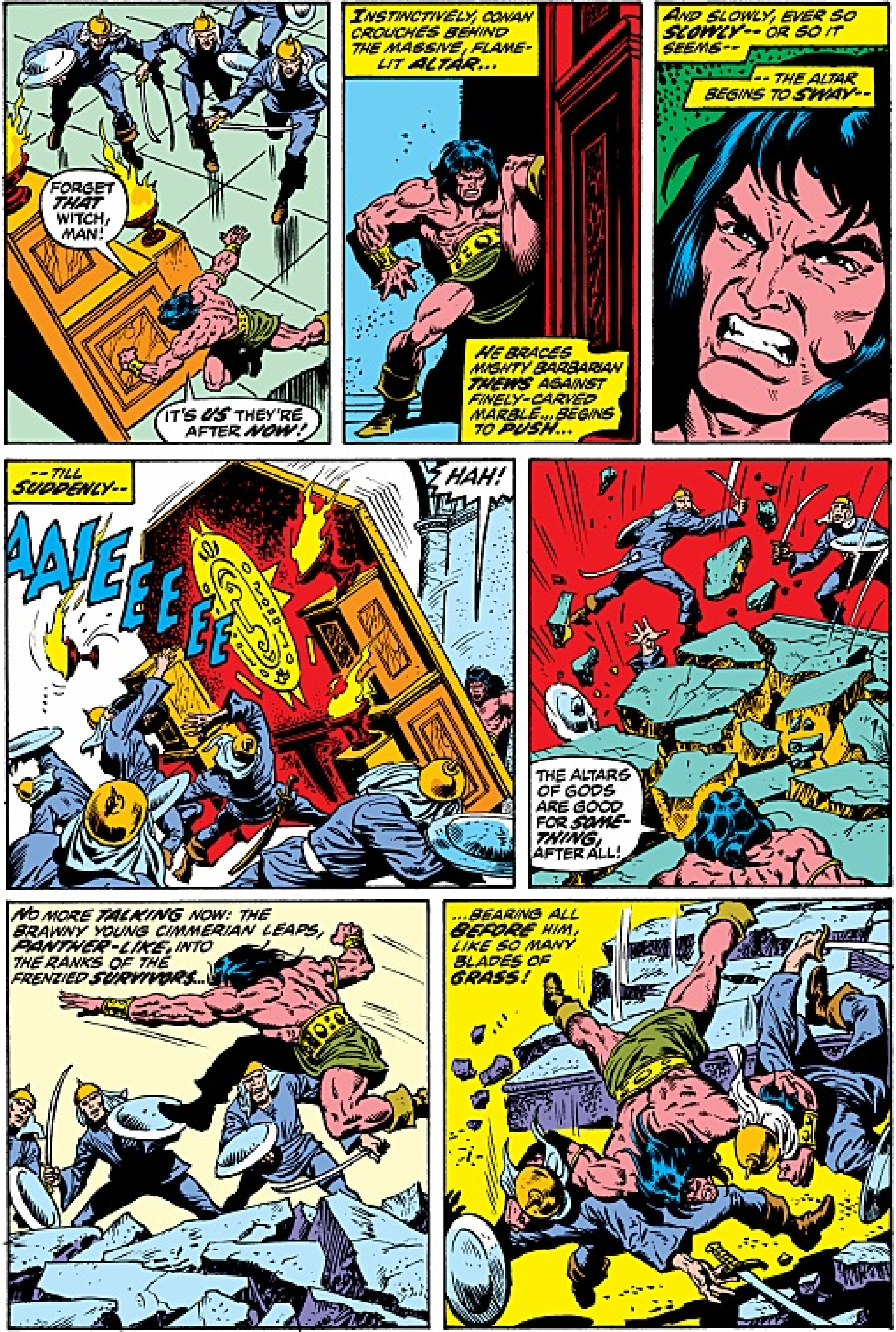
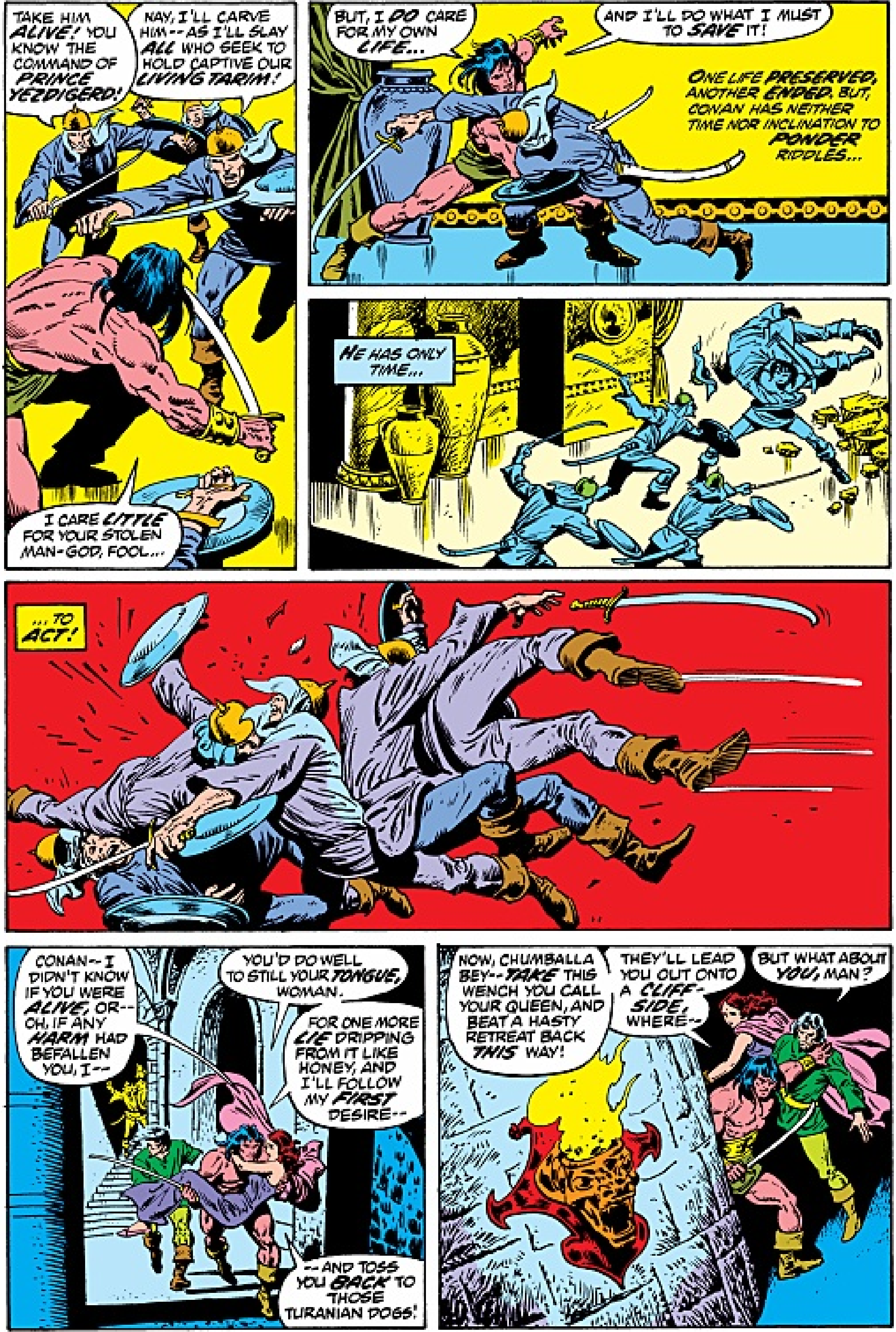


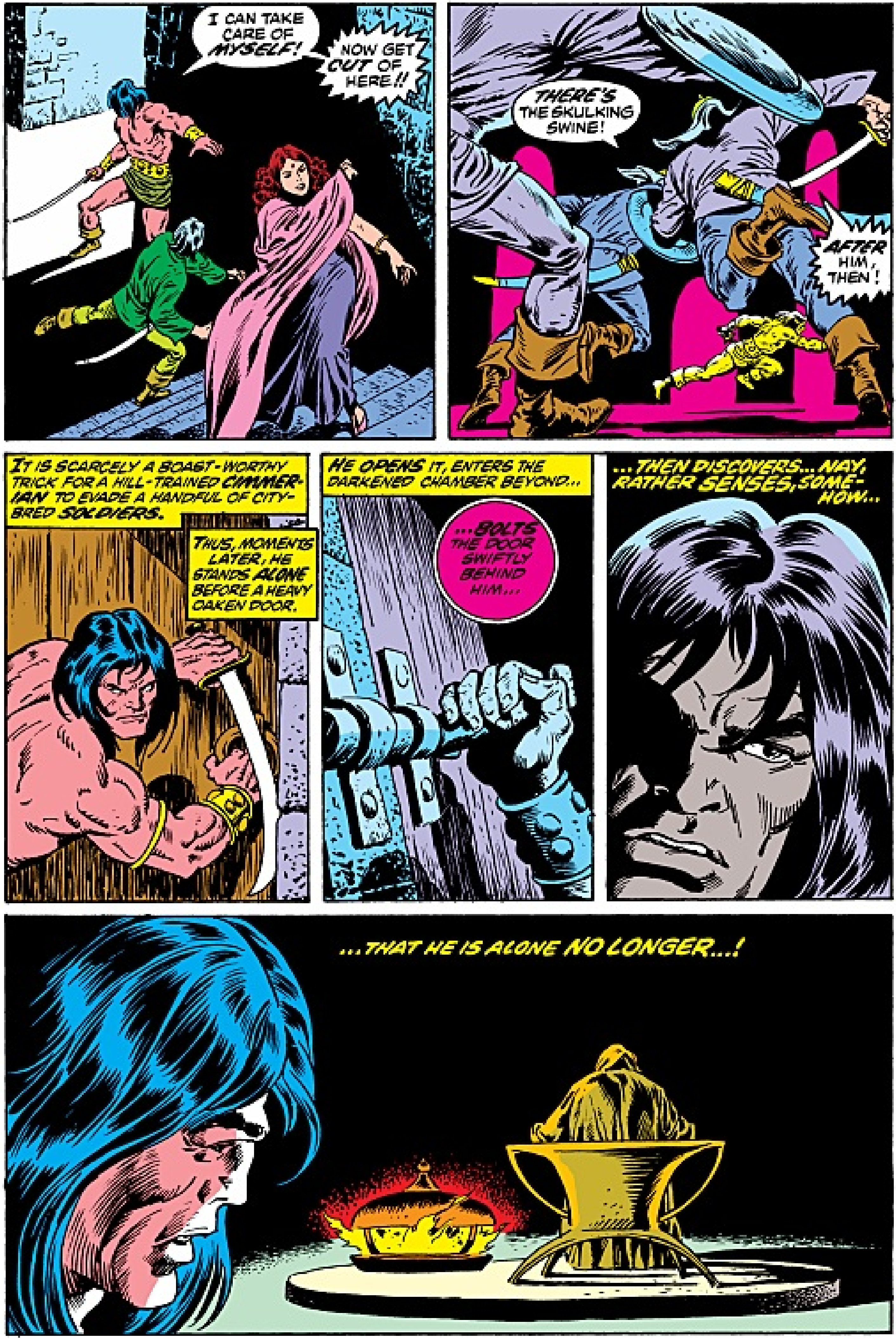
Tableau: THE MAN'S EYES REMAIN OPEN AND STARING AFTER HE DIES, AS IF THEY GAZE SHARPLY AT THAT WHICH LURKS ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE RIVER OF DEATH.
OR DO THEY LOOK, HELPLESS, AT THE SPECTRE OF A WASTED LIFE, SPENT IN VAIN PURSUIT OF POWER... OF A YOUTH LOST, AND OLD AGE NEVER REACHED... OF HALF-OPENED DOORS THAT NOW SHALL BE FOREVER CLOSED?
AS HE GLARES DOWN AT THE LIFELESS BODY OF KHARAM-AKKAD, CONAN DOES NOT KNOW...
...NOR DOES HE CARE.
HE MERELY TURNS, A LOW GRUNT ESCAPING HIS LIPS, TO LOOK UPON THE GLEAMING MIRROR...
AND, AS HE DOES SO, ITS IMAGE BEGINS TO SHIFT ONCE MORE... TO CHANGE INTO SOMETHING PERHAPS MORE DEADLY...!
A CIVILIZED MAN MIGHT HESITATE IN CURIOSITY... AND THUS BE LOST.
CONAN, HOWEVER, IS IN NO SUCH PERIL.
THEN, AMID THE LAST TINKLING OF FALLING SHARDS, HE HEARS...
OHHHHH
THE CAPTAIN-OF-GUARDS-- WHOSE EAGLE-HILTED SWORD SAVED MY HIDE...
STILL ALIVE?!

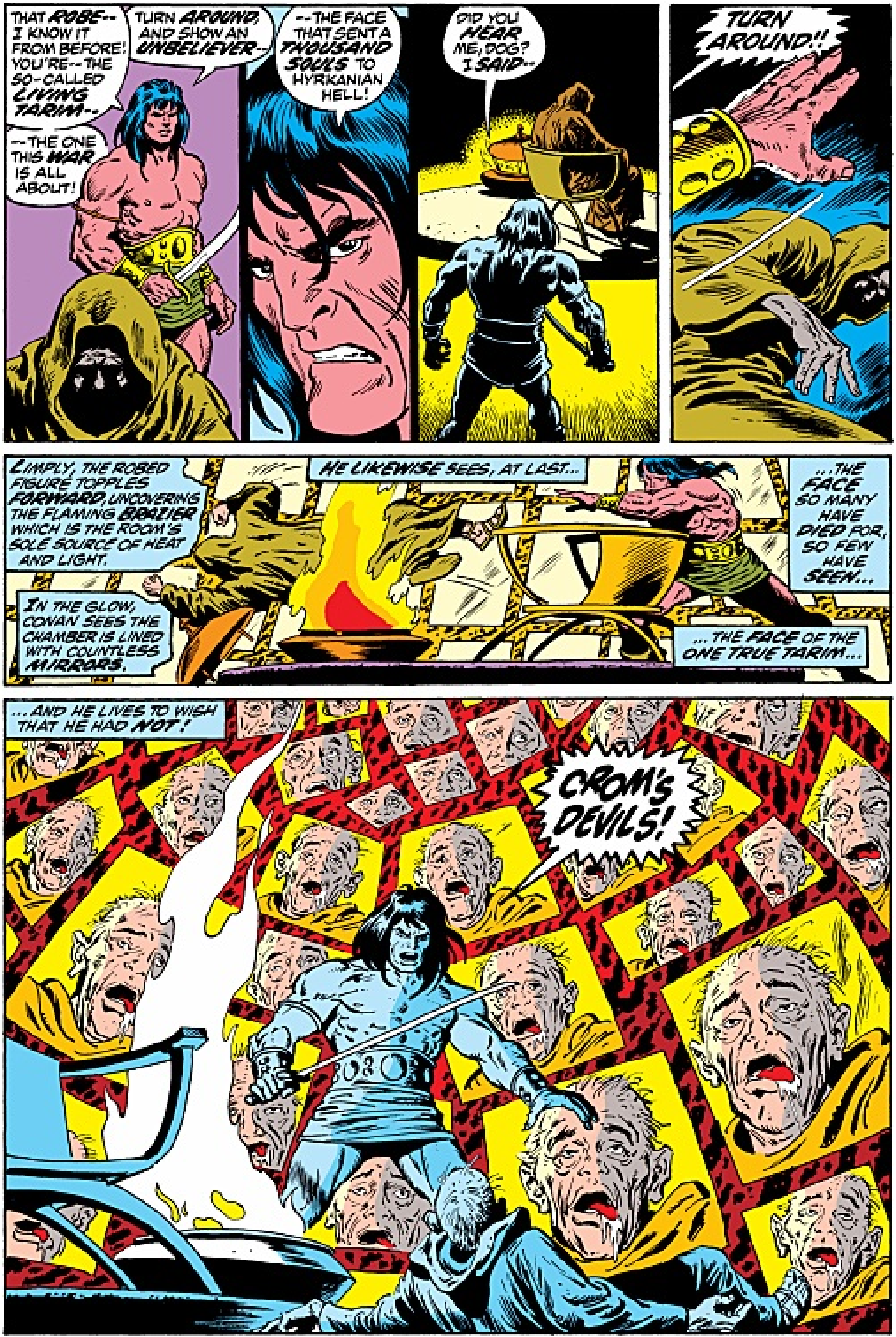

...STRIKE, THEN... AND END THIS PAIN... I FEEL...!
YOUR MEMORY FAILS YOU, DOG OF THE EAST...
IT WAS YOUR CITY'S OWN HIGH PRIEST WHO STABBED YOU... NOT I.
IT SEEMS YOU WON'T DIE, AFTER ALL! STILL...
...I'LL REMEMBER YOU LONG FOR THIS, BARBARIAN... OR MY NAME'S NOT CHUMBALLA BEY!
--BUT WHAT'S ALL THAT SHOUTING OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE?
THE TURANIANS HAVE LAUNCHED AN ALL-OUT ASSAULT, I'D WAGER.
NOW, HOLD STILL... AND THIS BANDAGE WILL EVEN THE DEBT I OWE YOU FOR TRYING TO SAVE ME BEFORE.
THEN, I'M TAKING A WAY I KNOW OUT OF THIS CITY... AND, IF THEN I CAN STEAL A HORSE...!
HORSE: WHAT WAS IT THE AUGURS OF TURAN PROPHESIED ABOUT A HORSE...?
"THE GRIFFIN SHALL BITE THE SERPENT IN TWAIN...
"...WHEN THE HORSE...
"...SPAWNS WALKING SWORDS!"
QUIET NOW, LADS... QUIET...!
BY ISHTAR'S GIRDLE--THAT CAVE-TUNNEL HAD MORE OFFSHOOTS THAN THE FABLED LABYRINTH OF KHORAJA!
LUCKY FOR US ONE TUNNEL LED INTO THAT HORSE'S HOLLOW BELLY!
LUCKIER STILL IF WE GET THIS GATE OPEN--
--BEFORE MORE DEFENDERS COME!

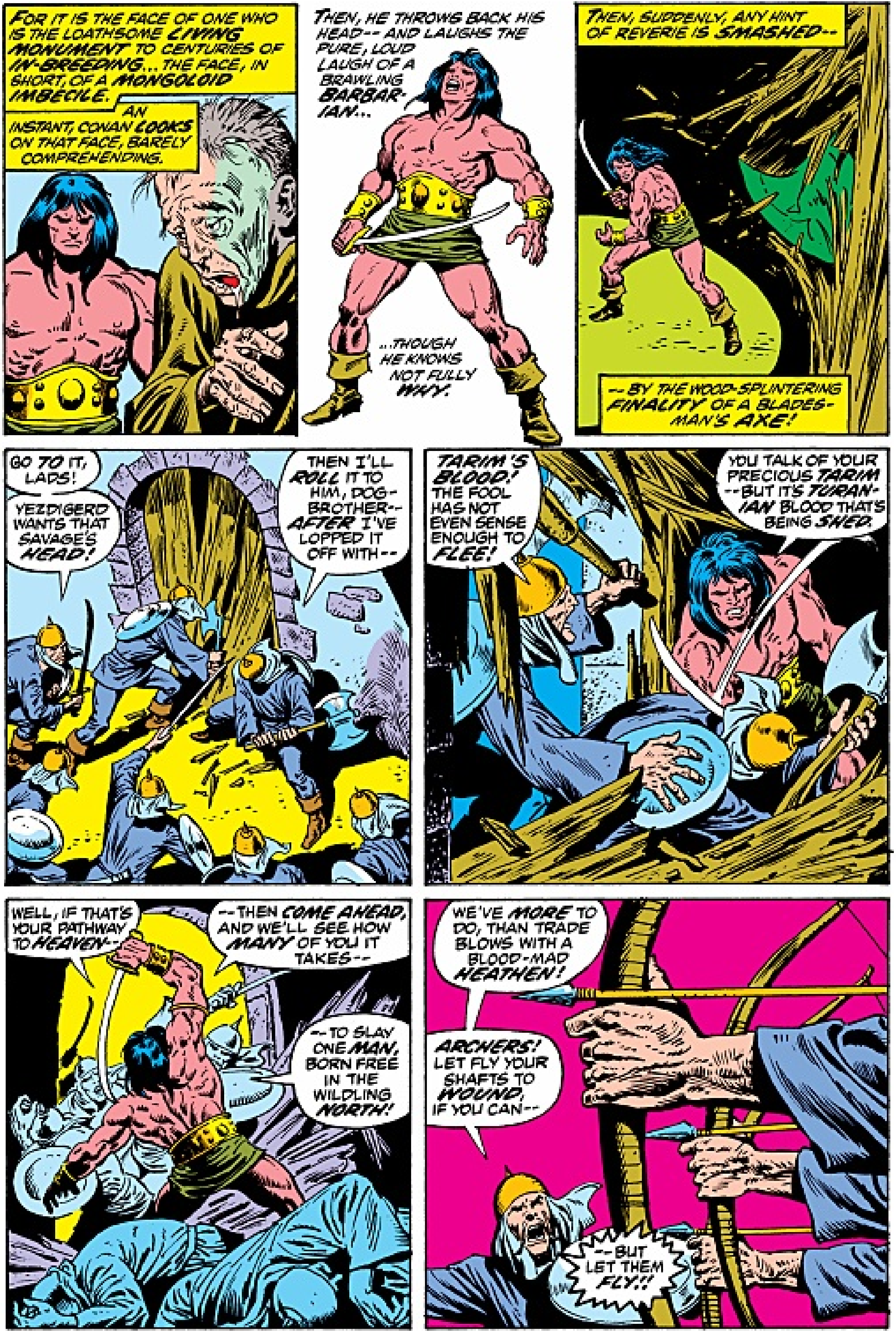

AND, THE MEN OF BELEAGUERED MAKKALET DO INDEED DRAW NEAR--TOO LATE!
ONWARD, MEN OF AGHRAPUR!
BY THE TARIM, WE'LL SHOW THESE PIGS WHAT IT MEANS TO DEFY THE GRIFFIN FLAG!
TURANIANS-- INSIDE THE CITY WALLS!
THEN-- WE ARE SURELY DOOMED!
...THE SOUNDS WITHOUT GROW LOUDER... LOUDER... LIKE THE THROBBING OF MY BROW.
SURELY, I SHOULD REJOIN MY MEN... MAN THE WALLS...
...NOT MAKE TO FLEE, LIKE YOU...!
SUIT YOURSELF.
LET'S SEE... I FLED DOWN THIS WAY BEFORE...
WHOA, FELLOW-- YOU'RE WEAKER FROM LOSS OF BLOOD THAN I THOUGHT. HERE -- LET ME--
NO! I'LL WALK OUT OF HERE-- NOT BE CARRIED OUT!
BUT--WHEN I THINK OF HOW, EARLIER, I TURNED YOU OVER TO KHARAM-AKKAD'S TENDER MERCIES...
AND NOW, YOU SAVED MY LIFE...
YOU DID THE SAME FOR ME.
IF WE MET AGAIN ON THE BATTLEFIELD, I'D STILL SPLIT YOUR GULLET-- PROVIDED YOU DIDN'T FIRST SPLIT MINE. BUT, AS IT IS--
CROM! NOW WHAT MADNESS--?
TURANIANS-- HERE, IN THE VERY TEMPLE OF TARIM--
--AND THEY'VE CAPTURED OUR QUEEN!!

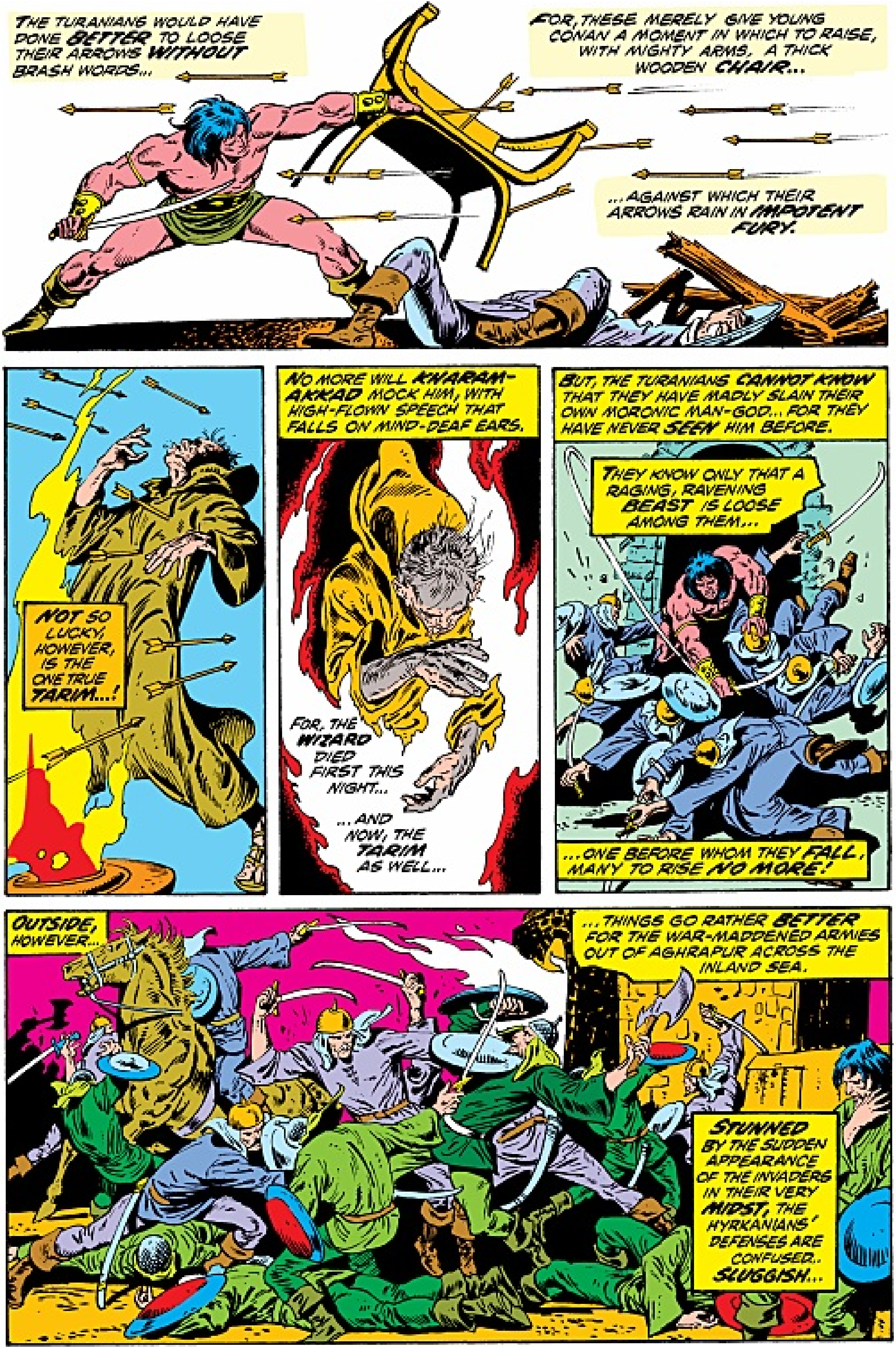

FORGET THAT WITCH, MAN!
IT'S US THEY'RE AFTER NOW!
INSTINCTIVELY, CONAN CROUCHES BEHIND THE MASSIVE, FLAME-LIT ALTAR...
HE BRACES MIGHTY BARBARIAN THEWS AGAINST FINELY-CARVED MARBLE... BEGINS TO PUSH...
AND SLOWLY, EVER SO SLOWLY-- OR SO IT SEEMS--
-- THE ALTAR BEGINS TO SWAY--
--TILL SUDDENLY--
HAH!
AAIEEEEEE
THE ALTARS OF GODS ARE GOOD FOR SOMETHING, AFTER ALL!
NO MORE TALKING NOW: THE BRAWNY YOUNG CIMMERIAN LEAPS, PANTHER-LIKE, INTO THE RANKS OF THE FRENZIED SURVIVORS...
...BEARING ALL BEFORE HIM, LIKE SO MANY BLADES OF GRASS!

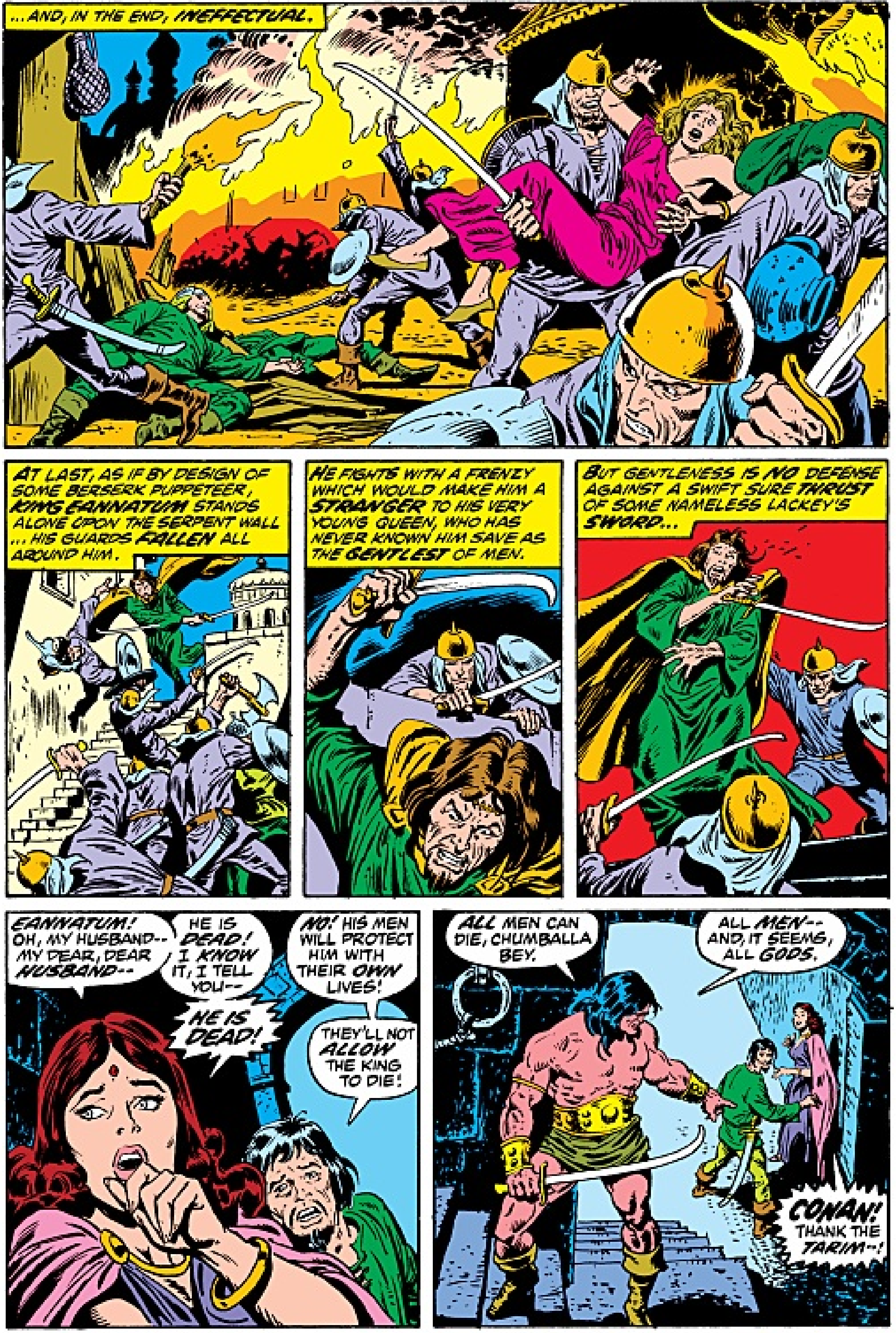

TAKE HIM ALIVE! YOU KNOW THE COMMAND OF PRINCE YEZDIGERD!
NAY, I'LL CARVE HIM-- AS I'LL SLAY ALL WHO SEEK TO HOLD CAPTIVE OUR LIVING TARIM!
I CARE LITTLE FOR YOUR STOLEN MAN-GOD, FOOL...
BUT, I DO CARE FOR MY OWN LIFE...
AND I'LL DO WHAT I MUST TO SAVE IT!
ONE LIFE PRESERVED, ANOTHER ENDED. BUT, CONAN HAS NEITHER TIME NOR INCLINATION TO PONDER RIDDLES...
HE HAS ONLY TIME...
...TO ACT!
CONAN-- I DIDN'T KNOW IF YOU WERE ALIVE, OR-- OH, IF ANY HARM HAD BEFALLEN YOU, I--
YOU'D DO WELL TO STILL YOUR TONGUE, WOMAN.
FOR ONE MORE LIE DRIPPING FROM IT LIKE HONEY, AND I'LL FOLLOW MY FIRST DESIRE--
--AND TOSS YOU BACK TO THOSE TURANIAN DOGS!
NOW, CHUMBALLA BEY-- TAKE THIS WENCH YOU CALL YOUR QUEEN, AND BEAT A HASTY RETREAT BACK THIS WAY!
THEY'LL LEAD YOU OUT ONTO A CLIFF-SIDE, WHERE--
BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU, MAN?

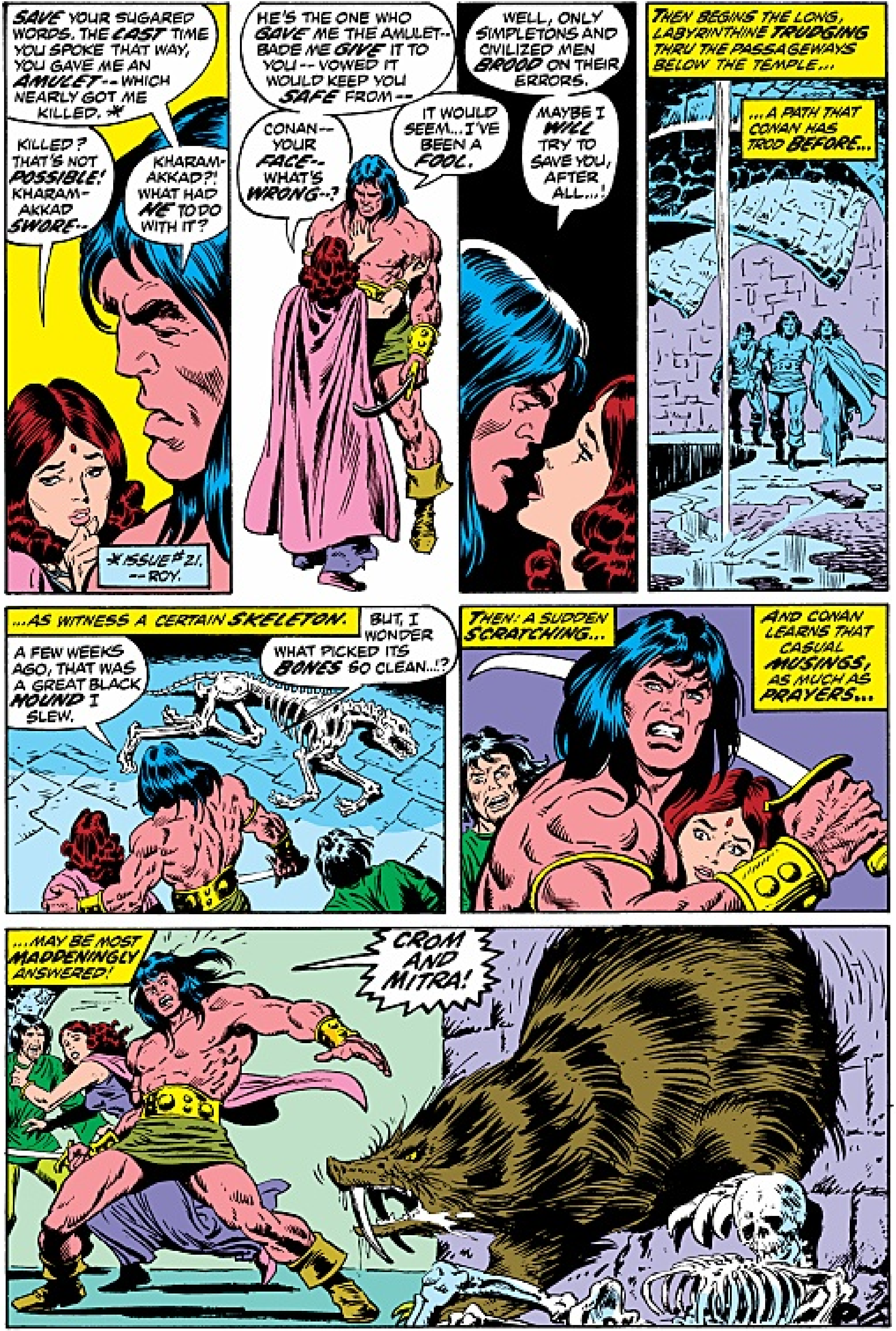

I CAN TAKE CARE OF *MYSELF*!
NOW GET *OUT* OF HERE!!
THERE'S THE SKULKING SWINE!
AFTER HIM, THEN!
IT IS SCARCELY A BOAST-WORTHY TRICK FOR A HILL-TRAINED **CIMMERIAN** *TO EVADE A HANDFUL OF CITY-BRED* **SOLDIERS.**
THUS, MOMENTS LATER, HE STANDS **ALONE** *BEFORE A HEAVY OAKEN DOOR.*
HE OPENS *IT, ENTERS THE DARKENED CHAMBER BEYOND...*
...BOLTS THE DOOR SWIFTLY BEHIND HIM...
...THEN DISCOVERS... **NAY,** *RATHER* **SENSES,** *SOMEHOW...*
...THAT HE IS ALONE **NO LONGER...!**

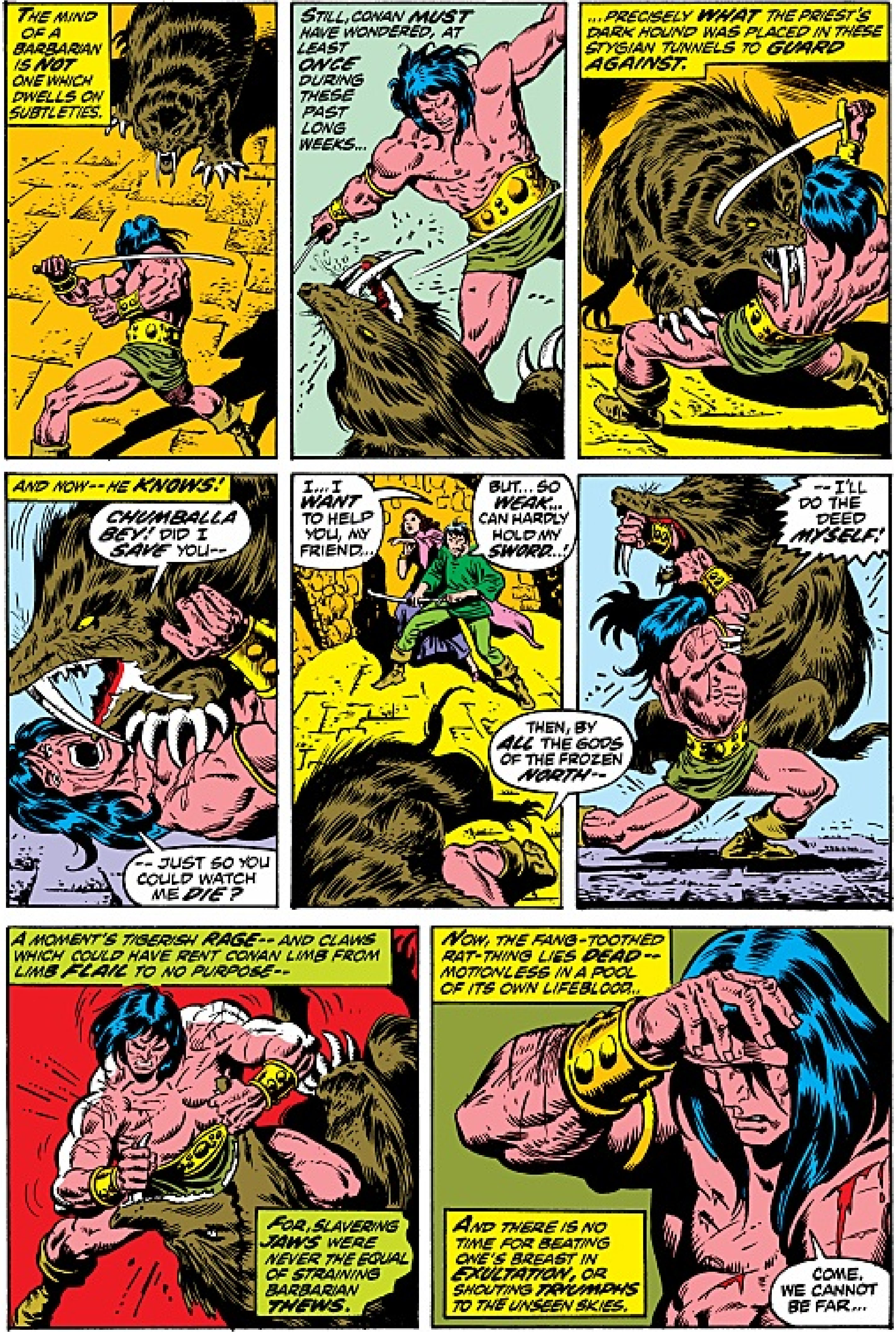

THAT ROBE-- I KNOW IT FROM BEFORE! YOU'RE--THE SO-CALLED LIVING TARIM--
--THE ONE THIS WAR IS ALL ABOUT!
TURN AROUND, AND SHOW AN UNBELIEVER--
--THE FACE THAT SENT A THOUSAND SOULS TO HYRKANIAN HELL!
DID YOU HEAR ME, DOG? I SAID--
TURN AROUND!!
LIMPLY, THE ROBED FIGURE TOPPLES FORWARD, UNCOVERING THE FLAMING BRAZIER WHICH IS THE ROOM'S SOLE SOURCE OF HEAT AND LIGHT.
IN THE GLOW, CONAN SEES THE CHAMBER IS LINED WITH COUNTLESS MIRRORS.
HE LIKEWISE SEES, AT LAST...
...THE FACE SO MANY HAVE DIED FOR, SO FEW HAVE SEEN...
...THE FACE OF THE ONE TRUE TARIM...
...AND HE LIVES TO WISH THAT HE HAD NOT!
CROM'S DEVILS!

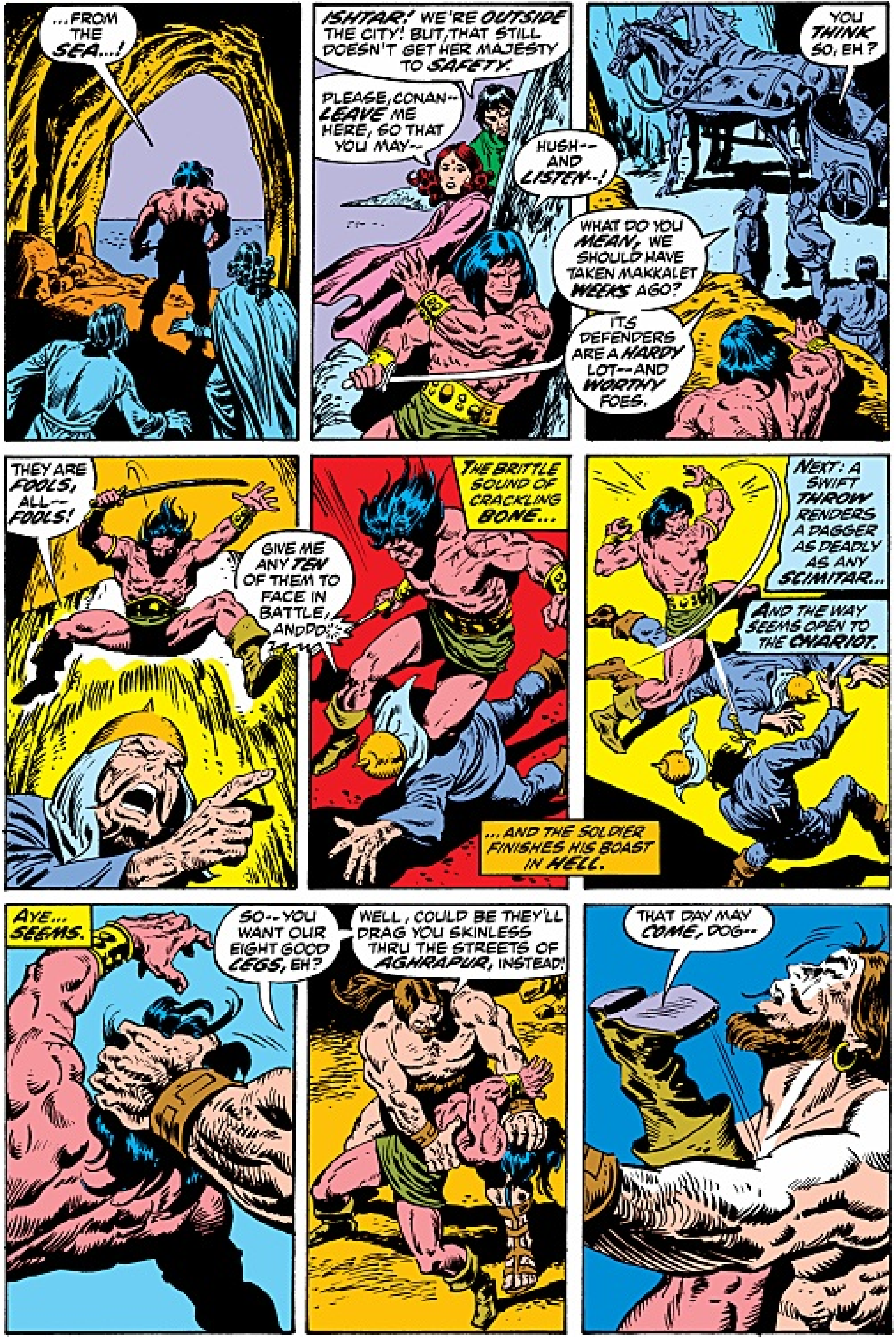

FOR IT IS THE FACE OF ONE WHO IS THE LOATHSOME *LIVING MONUMENT* TO CENTURIES OF *IN-BREEDING*... THE FACE, IN SHORT, OF A *MONGOLOID IMBECILE*.
AN INSTANT, CONAN *LOOKS* ON THAT FACE, BARELY COMPREHENDING.
THEN, HE THROWS BACK HIS HEAD-- AND LAUGHS THE PURE, LOUD LAUGH OF A BRAWLING *BARBARIAN*...
...THOUGH HE KNOWS NOT FULLY *WHY*.
THEN, SUDDENLY, ANY HINT OF REVERIE IS *SMASHED*--
--BY THE WOOD-SPLINTERING *FINALITY* OF A BLADESMAN'S *AXE!*
GO *TO* IT, LADS!
YEZDIGERD WANTS THAT SAVAGE'S *HEAD!*
THEN I'LL *ROLL* IT TO HIM, DOG-BROTHER-- *AFTER* I'VE LOPPED IT OFF WITH--
TARIM'S BLOOD! THE FOOL HAS NOT EVEN SENSE ENOUGH TO *FLEE!*
YOU TALK OF YOUR PRECIOUS *TARIM* --BUT IT'S *TURANIAN* BLOOD THAT'S BEING *SHED*.
WELL, IF THAT'S YOUR PATHWAY TO *HEAVEN*--
--THEN *COME AHEAD*, AND WE'LL SEE HOW *MANY* OF YOU IT TAKES--
--TO SLAY ONE *MAN*, BORN FREE IN THE WILDLING *NORTH!*
WE'VE *MORE* TO DO, THAN TRADE BLOWS WITH A BLOOD-MAD *HEATHEN!*
ARCHERS! LET FLY YOUR SHAFTS TO *WOUND*, IF YOU CAN--
--BUT LET THEM *FLY!!*

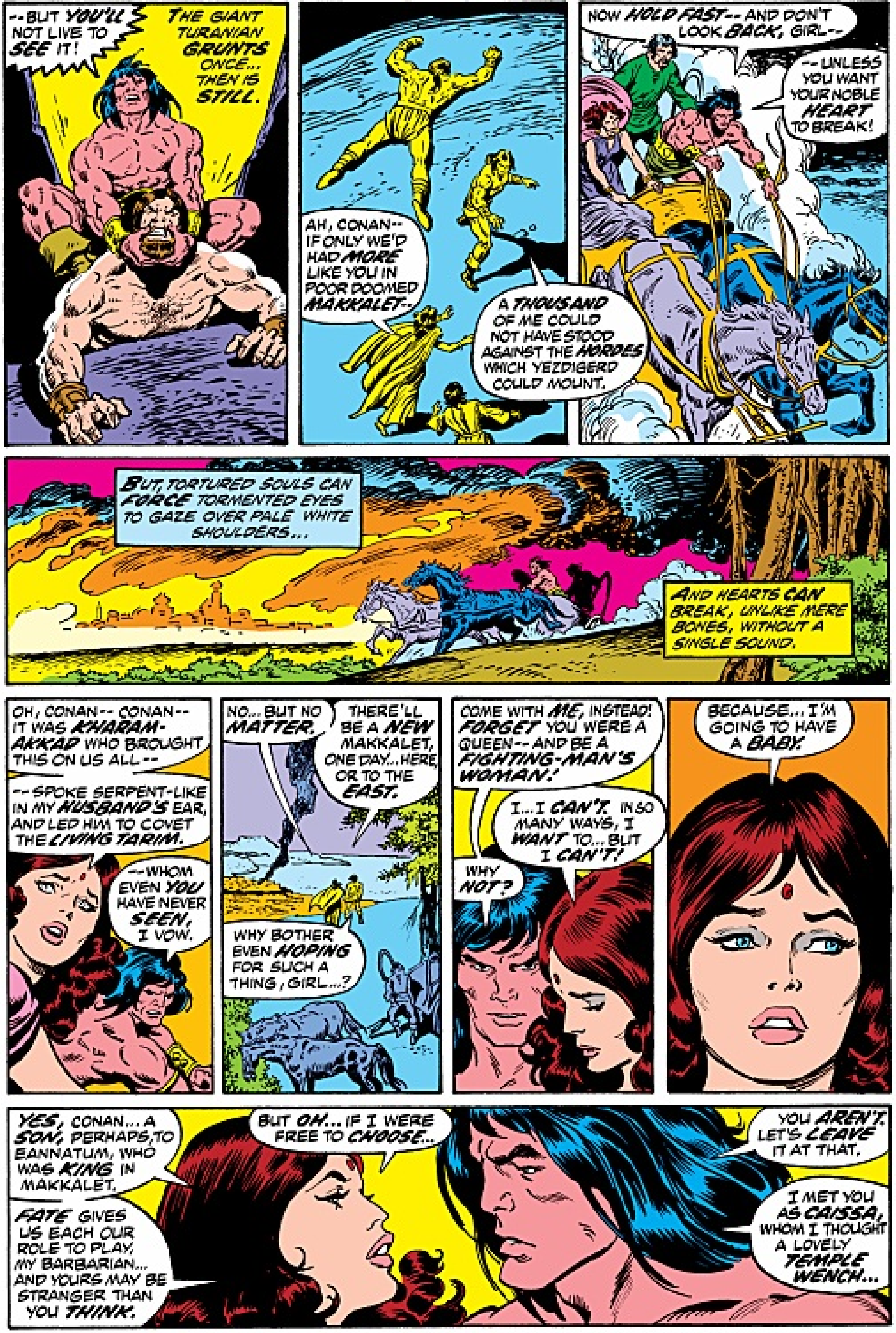

THE TURANIANS WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER TO LOOSE THEIR ARROWS WITHOUT BRASH WORDS...
FOR, THESE MERELY GIVE YOUNG CONAN A MOMENT IN WHICH TO RAISE, WITH MIGHTY ARMS, A THICK WOODEN CHAIR...
...AGAINST WHICH THEIR ARROWS RAIN IN IMPOTENT FURY.
NOT SO LUCKY, HOWEVER, IS THE ONE TRUE TARIM...!
NO MORE WILL KHARAM-AKKAD MOCK HIM, WITH HIGH-FLOWN SPEECH THAT FALLS ON MIND-DEAF EARS.
FOR, THE WIZARD DIED FIRST THIS NIGHT...
...AND NOW, THE TARIM AS WELL...
BUT, THE TURANIANS CANNOT KNOW THAT THEY HAVE MADLY SLAIN THEIR OWN MORONIC MAN-GOD... FOR THEY HAVE NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE.
THEY KNOW ONLY THAT A RAGING, RAVENING BEAST IS LOOSE AMONG THEM...
...ONE BEFORE WHOM THEY FALL, MANY TO RISE NO MORE!
OUTSIDE, HOWEVER...
...THINGS GO RATHER BETTER FOR THE WAR-MADDENED ARMIES OUT OF AGHRAPUR ACROSS THE INLAND SEA.
STUNNED BY THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF THE INVADERS IN THEIR VERY MIDST, THE HYRKANIANS' DEFENSES ARE CONFUSED.. SLUGGISH...

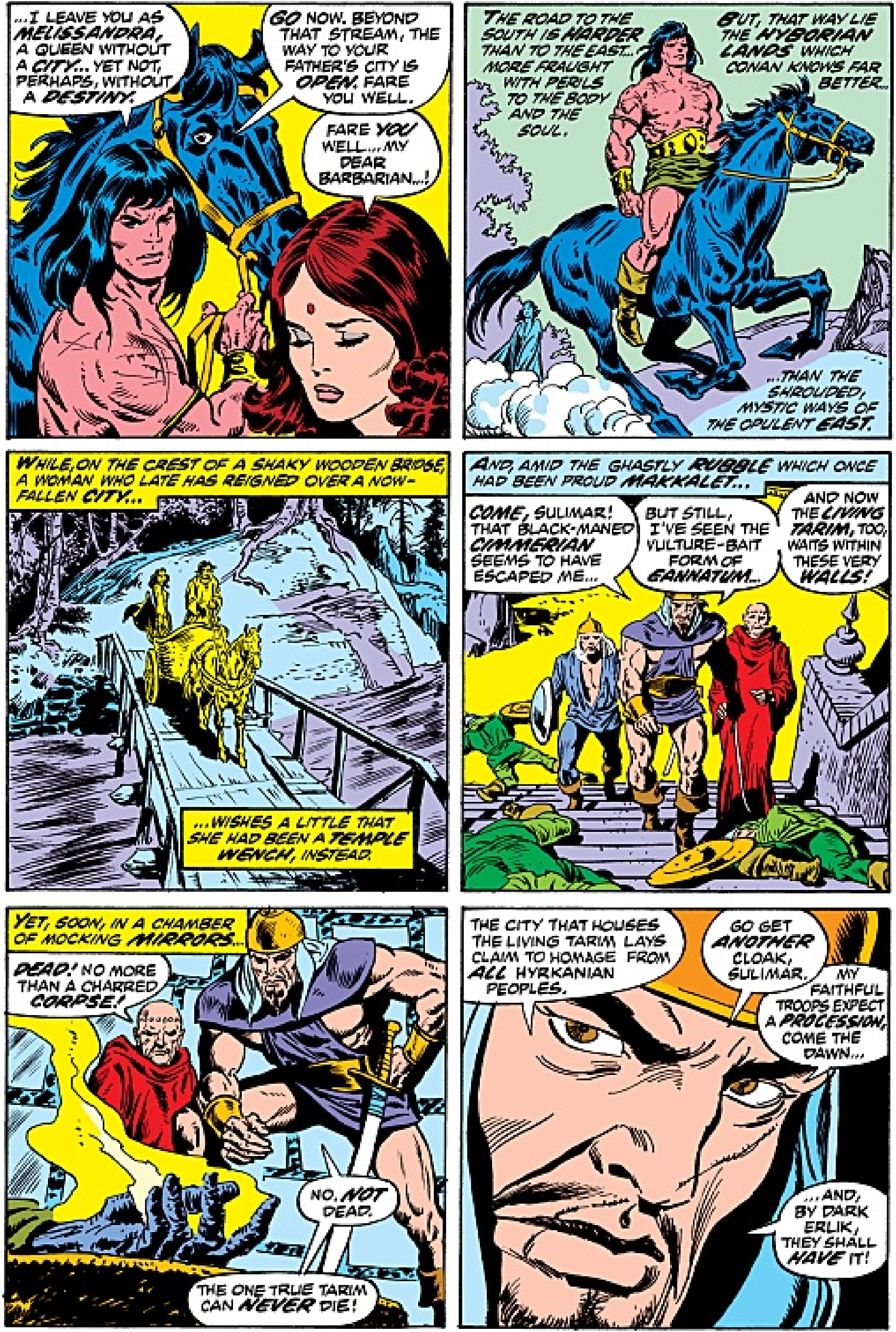

...AND, IN THE END, INEFFECTUAL.
AT LAST, AS IF BY DESIGN OF SOME BERSERK PUPPETEER, KING EANNATUM STANDS ALONE UPON THE SERPENT WALL ... HIS GUARDS FALLEN ALL AROUND HIM.
HE FIGHTS WITH A FRENZY WHICH WOULD MAKE HIM A STRANGER TO HIS VERY YOUNG QUEEN, WHO HAS NEVER KNOWN HIM SAVE AS THE GENTLEST OF MEN.
BUT GENTLENESS IS NO DEFENSE AGAINST A SWIFT SURE THRUST OF SOME NAMELESS LACKEY'S SWORD...
EANNATUM! OH, MY HUSBAND-- MY DEAR, DEAR HUSBAND--
HE IS DEAD! I KNOW IT, I TELL YOU--
HE IS DEAD!
NO! HIS MEN WILL PROTECT HIM WITH THEIR OWN LIVES!
THEY'LL NOT ALLOW THE KING TO DIE!
ALL MEN CAN DIE, CHUMBALLA BEY.
ALL MEN-- AND, IT SEEMS, ALL GODS.
CONAN! THANK THE TARIM--!


SAVE YOUR SUGARED WORDS. THE LAST TIME YOU SPOKE THAT WAY, YOU GAVE ME AN AMULET -- WHICH NEARLY GOT ME KILLED. *
KILLED? THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE! KHARAM-AKKAD SWORE--
KHARAM-AKKAD?! WHAT HAD ME TO DO WITH IT?
* ISSUE #21. -- ROY.
HE'S THE ONE WHO GAVE ME THE AMULET-- BADE ME GIVE IT TO YOU -- VOWED IT WOULD KEEP YOU SAFE FROM --
CONAN-- YOUR FACE-- WHAT'S WRONG--?
IT WOULD SEEM... I'VE BEEN A FOOL.
WELL, ONLY SIMPLETONS AND CIVILIZED MEN BROOD ON THEIR ERRORS.
MAYBE I WILL TRY TO SAVE YOU, AFTER ALL...!
THEN BEGINS THE LONG, LABYRINTHINE TRUDGING THRU THE PASSAGEWAYS BELOW THE TEMPLE...
...A PATH THAT CONAN HAS TROD BEFORE...
...AS WITNESS A CERTAIN SKELETON.
A FEW WEEKS AGO, THAT WAS A GREAT BLACK HOUND I SLEW.
BUT, I WONDER WHAT PICKED ITS BONES SO CLEAN...!?
THEN: A SUDDEN SCRATCHING...
AND CONAN LEARNS THAT CASUAL MUSINGS, AS MUCH AS PRAYERS...
...MAY BE MOST MADDENINGLY ANSWERED!
CROM AND MITRA!


THE MIND OF A BARBARIAN IS NOT ONE WHICH DWELLS ON SUBTLETIES.
STILL, CONAN MUST HAVE WONDERED, AT LEAST ONCE DURING THESE PAST LONG WEEKS...
...PRECISELY WHAT THE PRIEST'S DARK HOUND WAS PLACED IN THESE STYGIAN TUNNELS TO GUARD AGAINST.
AND NOW-- HE KNOWS!
CHUMBALLA BEY! DID I SAVE YOU--
-- JUST SO YOU COULD WATCH ME DIE?
I...I WANT TO HELP YOU, MY FRIEND...
BUT... SO WEAK... CAN HARDLY HOLD MY SWORD...!
THEN, BY ALL THE GODS OF THE FROZEN NORTH--
-- I'LL DO THE DEED MYSELF!
A MOMENT'S TIGERISH RAGE-- AND CLAWS WHICH COULD HAVE RENT CONAN LIMB FROM LIMB FLAIL TO NO PURPOSE--
FOR, SLAVERING JAWS WERE NEVER THE EQUAL OF STRAINING BARBARIAN THEWS.
NOW, THE FANG-TOOTHED RAT-THING LIES DEAD-- MOTIONLESS IN A POOL OF ITS OWN LIFEBLOOD...
AND THERE IS NO TIME FOR BEATING ONE'S BREAST IN EXULTATION, OR SHOUTING TRIUMPHS TO THE UNSEEN SKIES.
COME. WE CANNOT BE FAR...

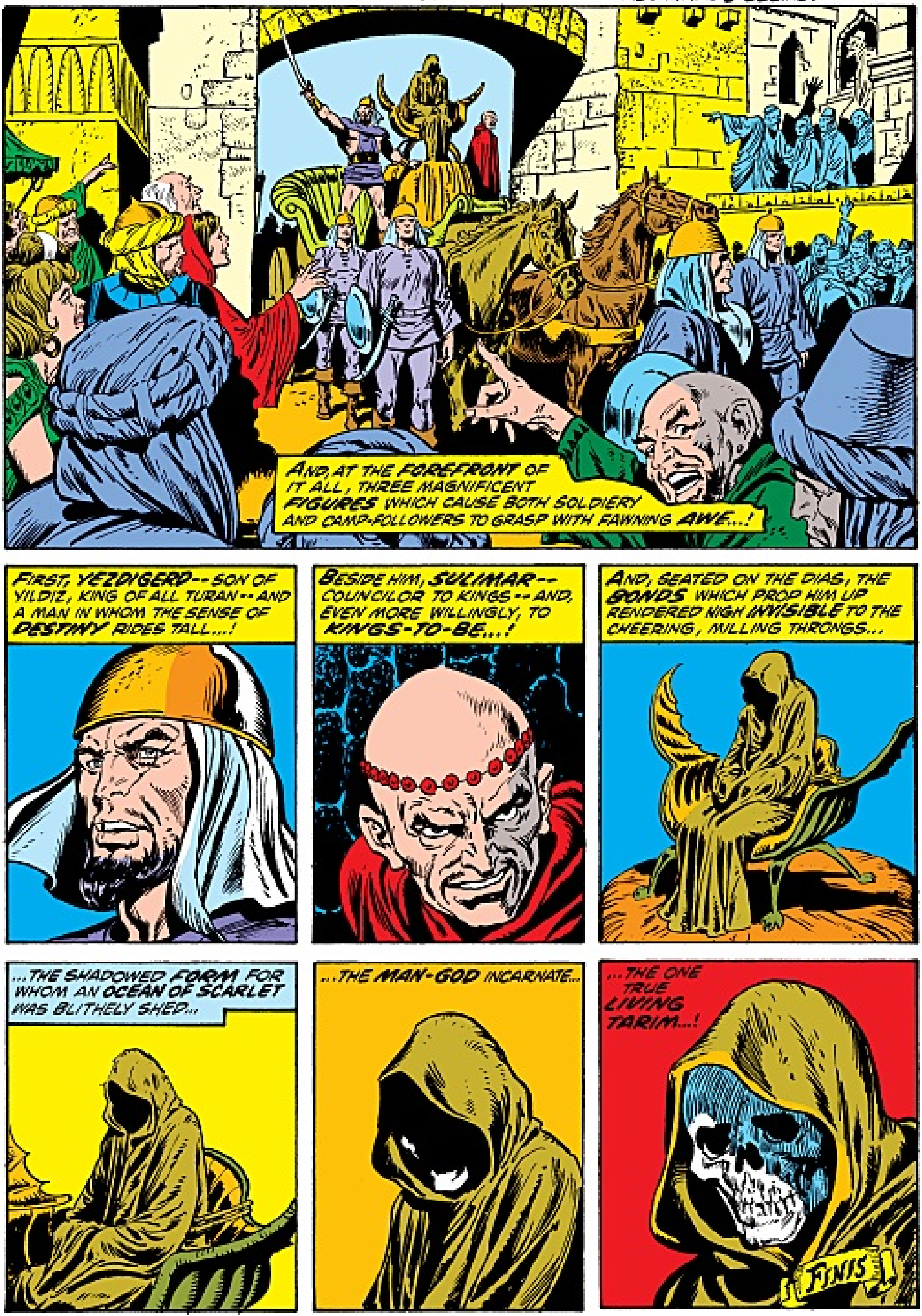

...FROM THE *SEA*...!
ISHTAR! WE'RE *OUTSIDE* THE CITY! BUT, THAT STILL DOESN'T GET HER MAJESTY TO *SAFETY.*
PLEASE, CONAN-- *LEAVE* ME HERE, SO THAT YOU MAY--
HUSH-- AND *LISTEN*--!
YOU *THINK* SO, EH?
WHAT DO YOU *MEAN,* WE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN MAKKALET *WEEKS* AGO?
ITS DEFENDERS ARE A *HARDY* LOT--AND *WORTHY* FOES.
THEY ARE *FOOLS,* ALL-- *FOOLS!*
GIVE ME ANY *TEN* OF THEM TO FACE IN BATTLE, ANDDD--
THE BRITTLE SOUND OF CRACKLING BONE...
...AND THE SOLDIER FINISHES HIS BOAST IN HELL.
NEXT: A SWIFT THROW RENDERS A DAGGER AS DEADLY AS ANY SCIMITAR...
AND THE WAY SEEMS OPEN TO THE CHARIOT.
AYE... SEEMS.
SO--YOU WANT OUR EIGHT GOOD *LEGS,* EH?
WELL, COULD BE THEY'LL DRAG YOU SKINLESS THRU THE STREETS OF *AGHRAPUR,* INSTEAD!
THAT DAY MAY *COME,* DOG--

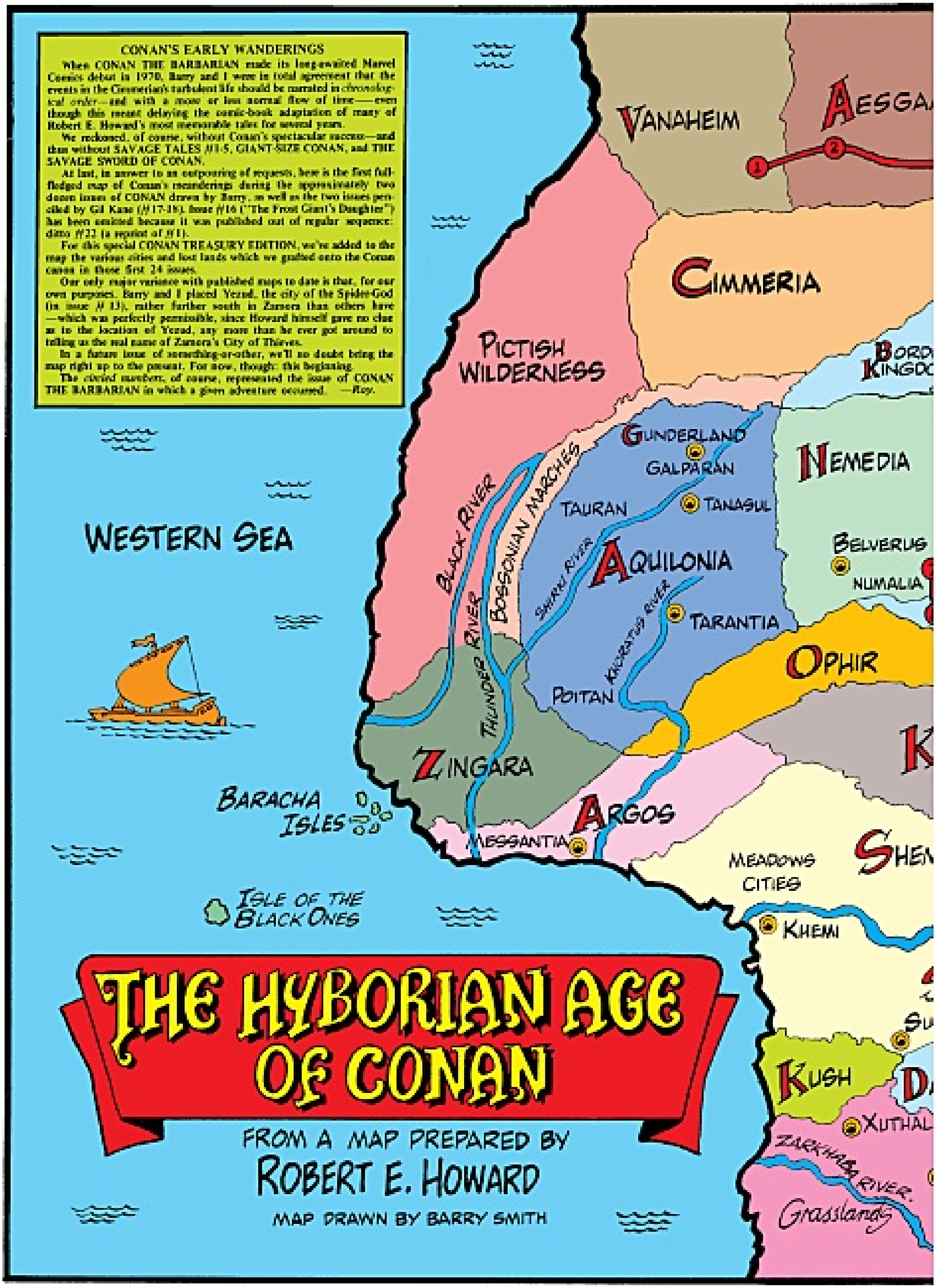

--BUT YOU'LL NOT LIVE TO SEE IT!
THE GIANT TURANIAN GRUNTS ONCE... THEN IS STILL.
AH, CONAN-- IF ONLY WE'D HAD MORE LIKE YOU IN POOR DOOMED MAKKALET--
A THOUSAND OF ME COULD NOT HAVE STOOD AGAINST THE HORDES WHICH YEZDIGERD COULD MOUNT.
NOW HOLD FAST-- AND DON'T LOOK BACK, GIRL--
--UNLESS YOU WANT YOUR NOBLE HEART TO BREAK!
BUT, TORTURED SOULS CAN FORCE TORMENTED EYES TO GAZE OVER PALE WHITE SHOULDERS...
AND HEARTS CAN BREAK, UNLIKE MERE BONES, WITHOUT A SINGLE SOUND.
OH, CONAN-- CONAN-- IT WAS KHARAM-AKKAD WHO BROUGHT THIS ON US ALL--
--SPOKE SERPENT-LIKE IN MY HUSBAND'S EAR, AND LED HIM TO COVET THE LIVING TARIM.
--WHOM EVEN YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN, I VOW.
NO... BUT NO MATTER.
THERE'LL BE A NEW MAKKALET, ONE DAY... HERE, OR TO THE EAST.
WHY BOTHER EVEN HOPING FOR SUCH A THING, GIRL...?
COME WITH ME, INSTEAD! FORGET YOU WERE A QUEEN-- AND BE A FIGHTING-MAN'S WOMAN!
I... I CAN'T. IN SO MANY WAYS, I WANT TO... BUT I CAN'T!
WHY NOT?
BECAUSE... I'M GOING TO HAVE A BABY.
YES, CONAN... A SON, PERHAPS, TO EANNATUM, WHO WAS KING IN MAKKALET.
BUT OH... IF I WERE FREE TO CHOOSE...
YOU AREN'T. LET'S LEAVE IT AT THAT.
FATE GIVES US EACH OUR ROLE TO PLAY, MY BARBARIAN... AND YOURS MAY BE STRANGER THAN YOU THINK.
I MET YOU AS CAISSA, WHOM I THOUGHT A LOVELY TEMPLE WENCH...


...I LEAVE YOU AS *MELISSANDRA*, A QUEEN WITHOUT A *CITY*... YET NOT, PERHAPS, WITHOUT A *DESTINY*.
GO NOW. BEYOND THAT STREAM, THE WAY TO YOUR FATHER'S CITY IS *OPEN*. FARE YOU WELL.
FARE *YOU* WELL.... MY DEAR BARBARIAN...!
THE ROAD TO THE SOUTH IS *HARDER* THAN TO THE EAST... MORE FRAUGHT WITH PERILS TO THE BODY AND THE SOUL.
BUT, THAT WAY LIE THE *HYBORIAN LANDS* WHICH CONAN KNOWS FAR BETTER...
...THAN THE SHROUDED, MYSTIC WAYS OF THE OPULENT *EAST*.
WHILE, ON THE CREST OF A SHAKY WOODEN BRIDGE, A WOMAN WHO LATE HAS REIGNED OVER A NOW-FALLEN *CITY*...
...WISHES A LITTLE THAT SHE HAD BEEN A *TEMPLE WENCH*, INSTEAD.
AND, AMID THE GHASTLY *RUBBLE* WHICH ONCE HAD BEEN PROUD *MAKKALET*...
COME, SULIMAR! THAT BLACK-MANED *CIMMERIAN* SEEMS TO HAVE ESCAPED ME...
BUT STILL, I'VE SEEN THE VULTURE-BAIT FORM OF *EANNATUM*...
AND NOW THE *LIVING TARIM*, TOO, WAITS WITHIN THESE VERY *WALLS*!
YET, SOON, IN A CHAMBER OF MOCKING *MIRRORS*...
DEAD! NO MORE THAN A CHARRED *CORPSE*!
NO, *NOT* DEAD.
THE ONE TRUE TARIM CAN *NEVER* DIE!
THE CITY THAT HOUSES THE LIVING TARIM LAYS CLAIM TO HOMAGE FROM *ALL* HYRKANIAN PEOPLES.
GO GET *ANOTHER* CLOAK, SULIMAR.
MY FAITHFUL TROOPS EXPECT A *PROCESSION*, COME THE DAWN...
...AND, BY DARK ERLIK, THEY SHALL *HAVE* IT!

EPILOGUE:

THE SUN'S BRIGHT MORNING EYE LOOKS DOWN ON SERPENTINE WALLS WHICH SURROUND A RAZED AND RAVAGED CITY... YET, AMID THE CARNAGE, **ALARUMS** SOUND... AND A TRIUMPHAL **PARADE** BEGINS!


AND, AT THE FOREFRONT OF IT ALL, THREE MAGNIFICENT FIGURES WHICH CAUSE BOTH SOLDIERY AND CAMP-FOLLOWERS TO GRASP WITH FAWNING AWE...!
FIRST, YEZDIGERD -- SON OF YILDIZ, KING OF ALL TURAN -- AND A MAN IN WHOM THE SENSE OF DESTINY RIDES TALL...!
BESIDE HIM, SULIMAR -- COUNCILOR TO KINGS -- AND, EVEN MORE WILLINGLY, TO KINGS-TO-BE...!
AND, SEATED ON THE DIAS, THE BONDS WHICH PROP HIM UP RENDERED NIGH INVISIBLE TO THE CHEERING, MILLING THRONGS...
...THE SHADOWED FORM FOR WHOM AN OCEAN OF SCARLET WAS BLITHELY SHED...
...THE MAN-GOD INCARNATE...
...THE ONE TRUE LIVING TARIM...!
FINIS



CONAN'S EARLY WANDERINGS

When CONAN THE BARBARIAN made its long-awaited Marvel Comics debut in 1970, Barry and I were in total agreement that the events in the Cimmerian's turbulent life should be narrated in *chronological order*—and with a more or less normal flow of time——even though this meant delaying the comic-book adaptation of many of Robert E. Howard's most memorable tales for several years.

We reckoned, of course, without Conan's spectacular success—and thus without SAVAGE TALES #1-5, GIANT-SIZE CONAN, and THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN.

At last, in answer to an outpouring of requests, here is the first full-fledged map of Conan's meanderings during the approximately two dozen issues of CONAN drawn by Barry, as well as the two issues penciled by Gil Kane (#17-18). Issue #16 ("The Frost Giant's Daughter") has been omitted because it was published out of regular sequence; ditto #22 (a reprint of #1).

For this special CONAN TREASURY EDITION, we've added to the map the various *cities* and lost lands which we grafted onto the Conan canon in those first 24 issues.

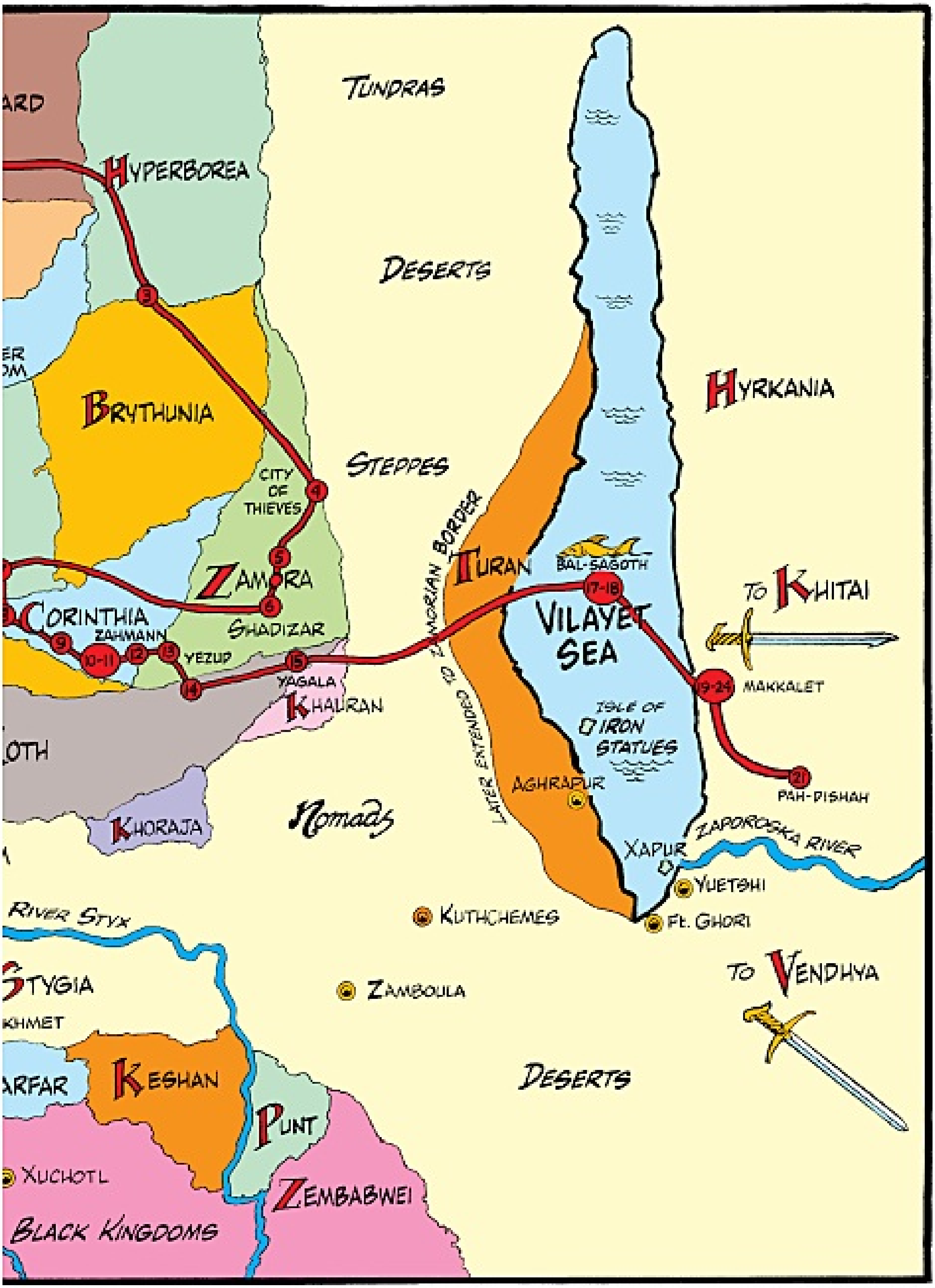
Our only major variance with published maps to date is that, for our own purposes, Barry and I placed Yezud, the city of the Spider-God (in issue # 13), rather further south in Zamora than others have—which was perfectly permissible, since Howard himself gave no clue as to the location of Yezud, any more than he ever got around to telling us the real name of Zamora's City of Thieves.

In a *future* issue of something-or-other, we'll no doubt bring the map right up to the present. For now, though: this beginning.

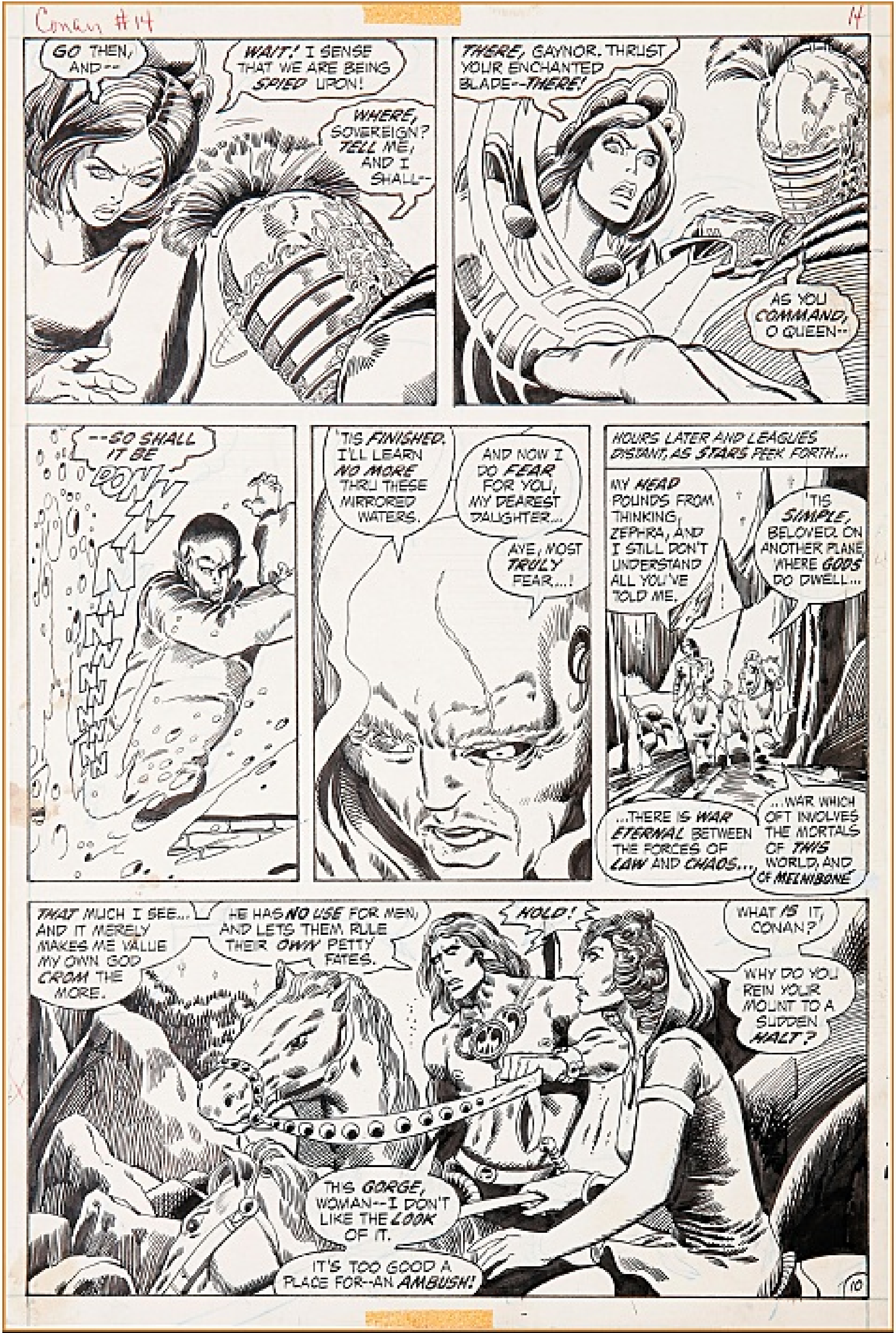
The *circled numbers*, of course, represented the issue of CONAN THE BARBARIAN in which a given adventure occurred. —*Roy.*

THE HYBORIAN AGE OF CONAN
FROM A MAP PREPARED BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD
MAP DRAWN BY BARRY SMITH
VANAHEIM
AESGA
①
②
CIMMERIA
PICTISH WILDERNESS
BORD
KINGDO
GUNDERLAND
GALPARAN
NEMEDIA
BLACK RIVER
BOSSONIAN MARCHES
TAURAN
TANASUL
WESTERN SEA
BELVERUS
AQUILONIA
NUMALIA
SHIRKI RIVER
KHORATUS RIVER
TARANTIA
THUNDER RIVER
OPHIR
POITAN
K
ZINGARA
BARACHA ISLES
ARGOS
MESSANTIA
MEADOWS CITIES
SHEM
ISLE OF THE BLACK ONES
KHEMI
SU
KUSH
D
XUTHAL
ZARKHEBA RIVER
Grasslands

MARVEL TREASURY EDITION #4 (1975), MAP OF CONAN'S ADVENTURES IN CONAN THE BARBARIAN #1-24


TUNDRAS
HYPERBOREA
DESERTS
BRYTHUNIA
STEPPES
CITY OF THIEVES
ZAMORA
SHADIZAR
CORINTHIA
ZAHMANN
YEZUD
YAGALA
KHAURAN
KHORAJA
Nomads
HYRKANIA
TURAN
BAL-SAGOTH
VILAYET SEA
TO KHITAI
MAKKALET
ISLE OF IRON STATUES
AGHRAPUR
PAH-DISHAH
ZAPOROSKA RIVER
XAPUR
YUETSHI
FT. GHORI
KUTHCHEMES
ZAMBOULA
RIVER STYX
STYGIA
KESHAN
PUNT
ZEMBABWEI
XUCHOTL
BLACK KINGDOMS
TO VENDHYA
DESERTS
LATER EXTENDED TO ZAMORIAN BORDER
3
4
5
6
9
10-11
12
13
14
15
17-18
19-24
21

WRITTEN BY ROY THOMAS WITH ART BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH FROM A MAP BY ROBERT E. HOWARD


Conan #14
14
GO THEN, AND--
WAIT! I SENSE THAT WE ARE BEING SPIED UPON!
WHERE, SOVEREIGN? TELL ME, AND I SHALL--
THERE, GAYNOR. THRUST YOUR ENCHANTED BLADE--THERE!
AS YOU COMMAND, O QUEEN--
--SO SHALL IT BE
DONNNNNNNNNNN
'TIS FINISHED. I'LL LEARN NO MORE THRU THESE MIRRORED WATERS.
AND NOW I DO FEAR FOR YOU, MY DEAREST DAUGHTER...
AYE, MOST TRULY FEAR...!
HOURS LATER AND LEAGUES DISTANT, AS STARS PEEK FORTH...
MY HEAD POUNDS FROM THINKING, ZEPHRA, AND I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND ALL YOU'VE TOLD ME.
'TIS SIMPLE, BELOVED. ON ANOTHER PLANE WHERE GODS DO DWELL...
...THERE IS WAR ETERNAL BETWEEN THE FORCES OF LAW AND CHAOS...
...WAR WHICH OFT INVOLVES THE MORTALS OF THIS WORLD, AND OF MELNIBONÉ.
THAT MUCH I SEE... AND IT MERELY MAKES ME VALUE MY OWN GOD CROM THE MORE.
HE HAS NO USE FOR MEN, AND LETS THEM RULE THEIR OWN PETTY FATES.
HOLD!
WHAT IS IT, CONAN?
WHY DO YOU REIN YOUR MOUNT TO A SUDDEN HALT?
THIS GORGE, WOMAN--I DON'T LIKE THE LOOK OF IT.
IT'S TOO GOOD A PLACE FOR--AN AMBUSH!
10

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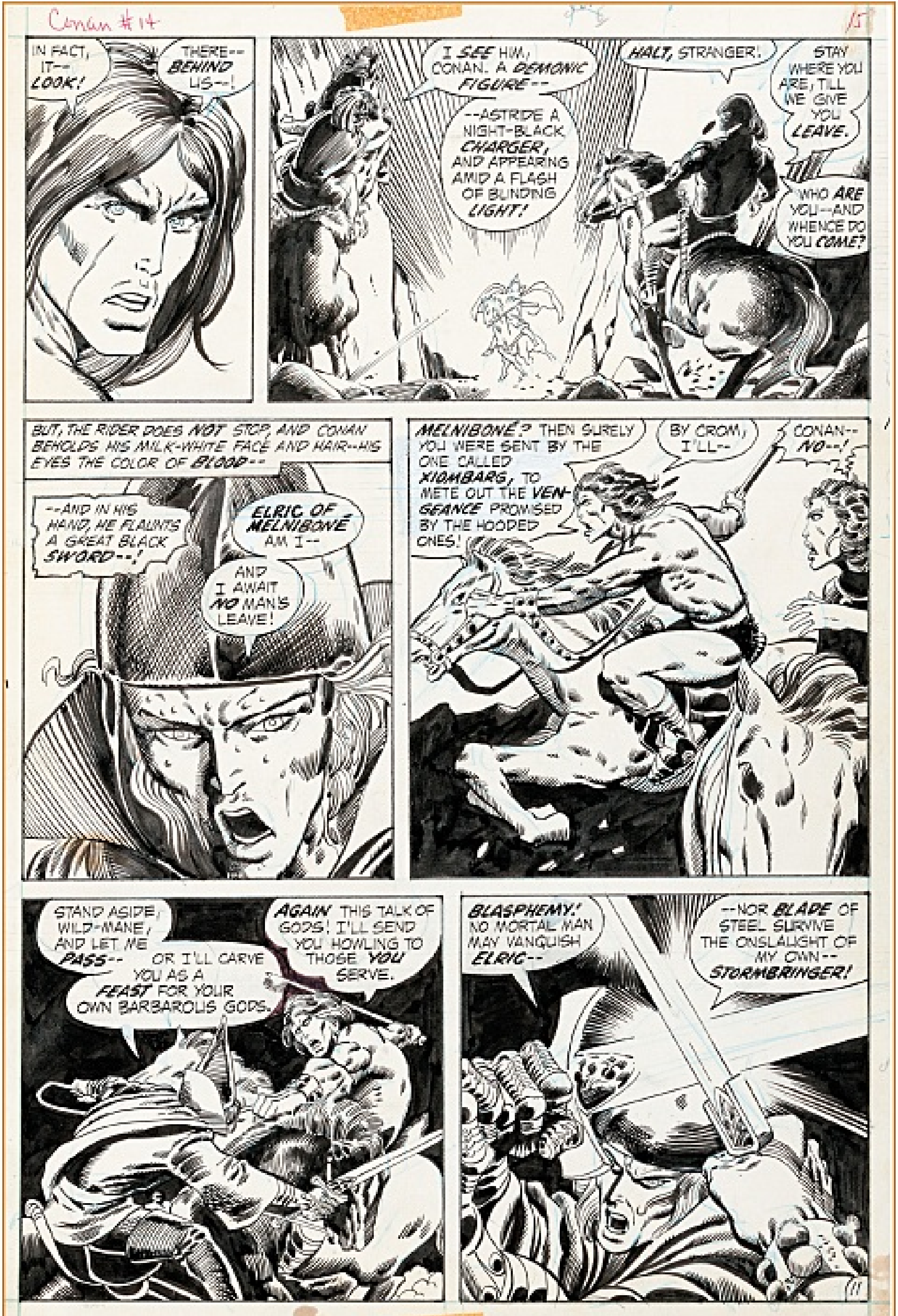
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #14, PAGE 10, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA


Conan #14
15
IN FACT, IT-- LOOK!
THERE-- BEHIND US--!
I SEE HIM, CONAN. A DEMONIC FIGURE--
--ASTRIDE A NIGHT-BLACK CHARGER, AND APPEARING AMID A FLASH OF BLINDING LIGHT!
HALT, STRANGER!
STAY WHERE YOU ARE, TILL WE GIVE YOU LEAVE.
WHO ARE YOU--AND WHENCE DO YOU COME?
BUT, THE RIDER DOES NOT STOP, AND CONAN BEHOLDS HIS MILK-WHITE FACE AND HAIR--HIS EYES THE COLOR OF BLOOD--
--AND IN HIS HAND, HE FLAUNTS A GREAT BLACK SWORD--!
ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ AM I--
AND I AWAIT NO MAN'S LEAVE!
MELNIBONÉ? THEN SURELY YOU WERE SENT BY THE ONE CALLED XIOMBARG, TO METE OUT THE VENGEANCE PROMISED BY THE HOODED ONES!
BY CROM, I'LL--
CONAN-- NO--!
STAND ASIDE, WILD-MANE, AND LET ME PASS-- OR I'LL CARVE YOU AS A FEAST FOR YOUR OWN BARBAROUS GODS.
AGAIN THIS TALK OF GODS! I'LL SEND YOU HOWLING TO THOSE YOU SERVE.
BLASPHEMY! NO MORTAL MAN MAY VANQUISH ELRIC--
--NOR BLADE OF STEEL SURVIVE THE ONSLAUGHT OF MY OWN-- STORMBRINGER!
11

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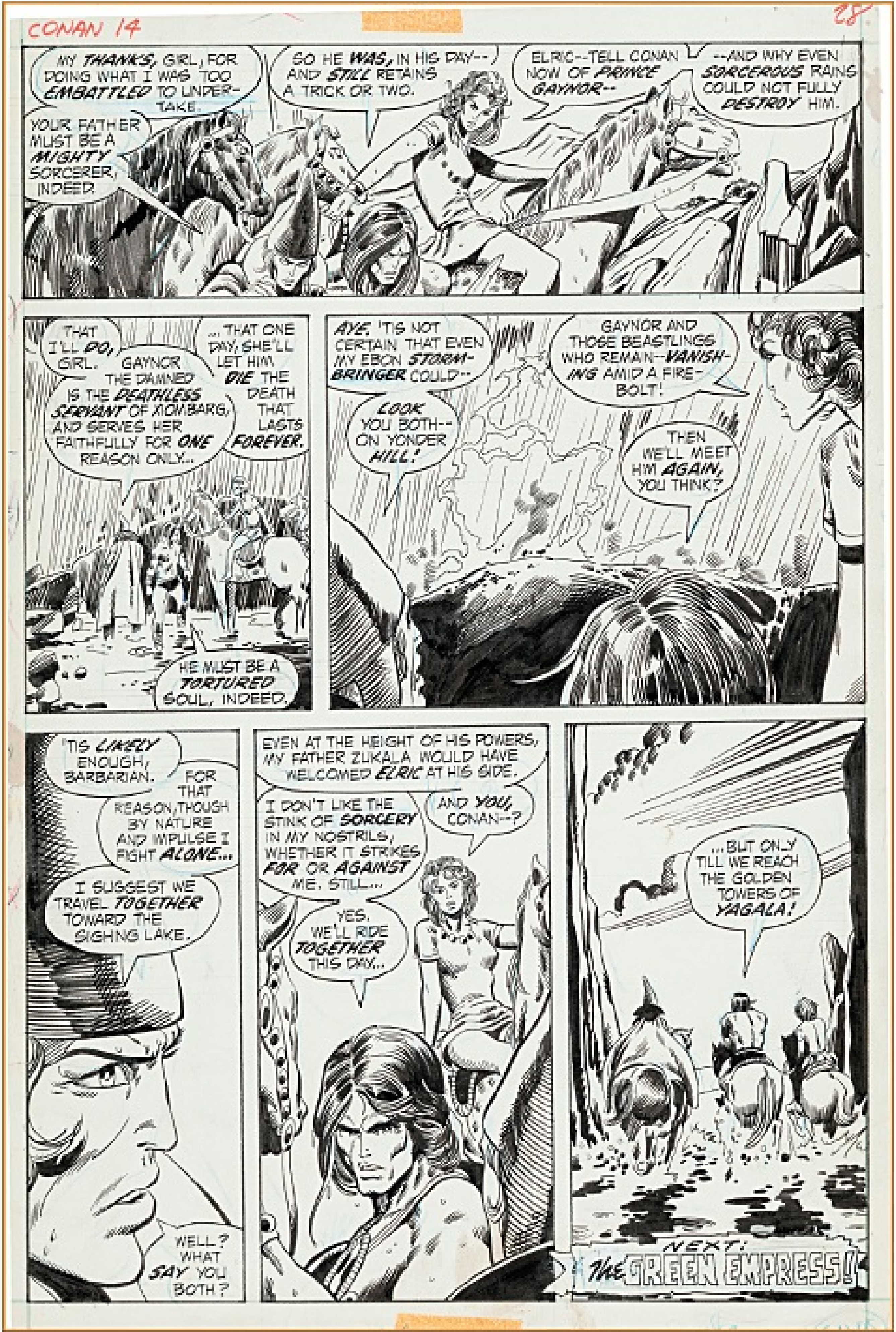
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #14, PAGE 11, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA


CONAN 14
28
MY THANKS, GIRL, FOR DOING WHAT I WAS TOO EMBATTLED TO UNDERTAKE.
YOUR FATHER MUST BE A MIGHTY SORCERER, INDEED.
SO HE WAS, IN HIS DAY-- AND STILL RETAINS A TRICK OR TWO.
ELRIC--TELL CONAN NOW OF PRINCE GAYNOR--
--AND WHY EVEN SORCEROUS RAINS COULD NOT FULLY DESTROY HIM.
THAT I'LL DO, GIRL.
GAYNOR THE DAMNED IS THE DEATHLESS SERVANT OF XIOMBARG, AND SERVES HER FAITHFULLY FOR ONE REASON ONLY...
...THAT ONE DAY, SHE'LL LET HIM DIE THE DEATH THAT LASTS FOREVER.
HE MUST BE A TORTURED SOUL, INDEED.
AYE. 'TIS NOT CERTAIN THAT EVEN MY EBON STORMBRINGER COULD--
LOOK YOU BOTH-- ON YONDER HILL!
GAYNOR AND THOSE BEASTLINGS WHO REMAIN--VANISHING AMID A FIRE-BOLT!
THEN WE'LL MEET HIM AGAIN, YOU THINK?
'TIS LIKELY ENOUGH, BARBARIAN.
FOR THAT REASON, THOUGH BY NATURE AND IMPULSE I FIGHT ALONE...
I SUGGEST WE TRAVEL TOGETHER TOWARD THE SIGHING LAKE.
WELL? WHAT SAY YOU BOTH?
EVEN AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS POWERS, MY FATHER ZUKALA WOULD HAVE WELCOMED ELRIC AT HIS SIDE.
AND YOU, CONAN--?
I DON'T LIKE THE STINK OF SORCERY IN MY NOSTRILS, WHETHER IT STRIKES FOR OR AGAINST ME. STILL...
YES, WE'LL RIDE TOGETHER THIS DAY...
...BUT ONLY TILL WE REACH THE GOLDEN TOWERS OF YAGALA!
NEXT: THE GREEN EMPRESS!

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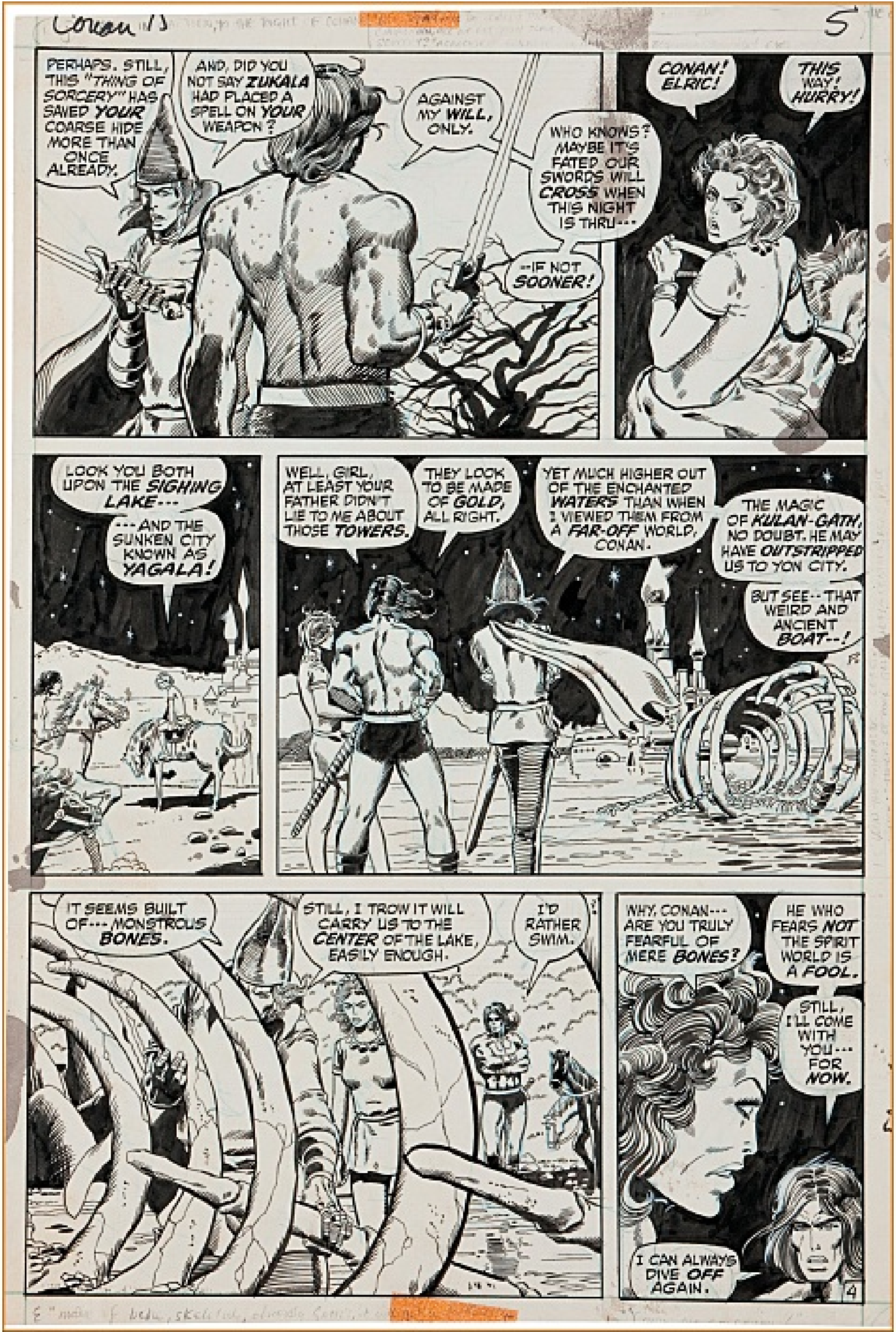
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #14, PAGE 21, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA


Conan #15
5
PERHAPS. STILL, THIS "THING OF SORCERY" HAS SAVED YOUR COARSE HIDE MORE THAN ONCE ALREADY.
AND, DID YOU NOT SAY ZUKALA HAD PLACED A SPELL ON YOUR WEAPON?
AGAINST MY WILL, ONLY.
WHO KNOWS? MAYBE IT'S FATED OUR SWORDS WILL CROSS WHEN THIS NIGHT IS THRU---
--IF NOT SOONER!
CONAN! ELRIC!
THIS WAY! HURRY!
LOOK YOU BOTH UPON THE SIGHING LAKE---
---AND THE SUNKEN CITY KNOWN AS YAGALA!
WELL, GIRL, AT LEAST YOUR FATHER DIDN'T LIE TO ME ABOUT THOSE TOWERS.
THEY LOOK TO BE MADE OF GOLD, ALL RIGHT.
YET MUCH HIGHER OUT OF THE ENCHANTED WATERS THAN WHEN I VIEWED THEM FROM A FAR-OFF WORLD, CONAN.
THE MAGIC OF KULAN-GATH, NO DOUBT. HE MAY HAVE OUTSTRIPPED US TO YON CITY.
BUT SEE--THAT WEIRD AND ANCIENT BOAT--!
IT SEEMS BUILT OF--- MONSTROUS BONES.
STILL, I TROW IT WILL CARRY US TO THE CENTER OF THE LAKE, EASILY ENOUGH.
I'D RATHER SWIM.
WHY, CONAN--- ARE YOU TRULY FEARFUL OF MERE BONES?
HE WHO FEARS NOT THE SPIRIT WORLD IS A FOOL.
STILL, I'LL COME WITH YOU--- FOR NOW.
I CAN ALWAYS DIVE OFF AGAIN.
4

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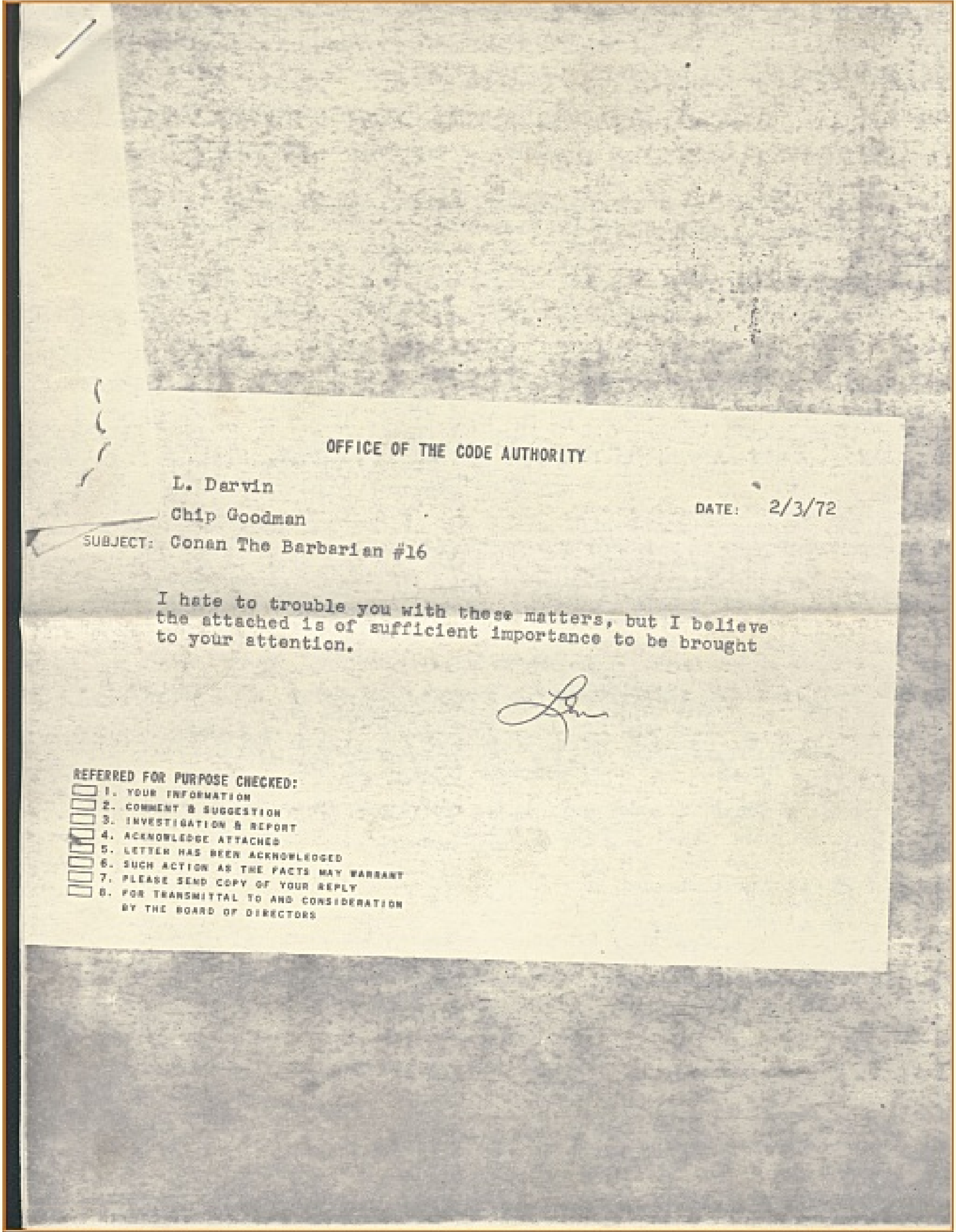
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #15, PAGE 4, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA



OFFICE OF THE CODE AUTHORITY

L. Darvin

Chip Goodman

DATE: 2/3/72

SUBJECT: Conan The Barbarian #16

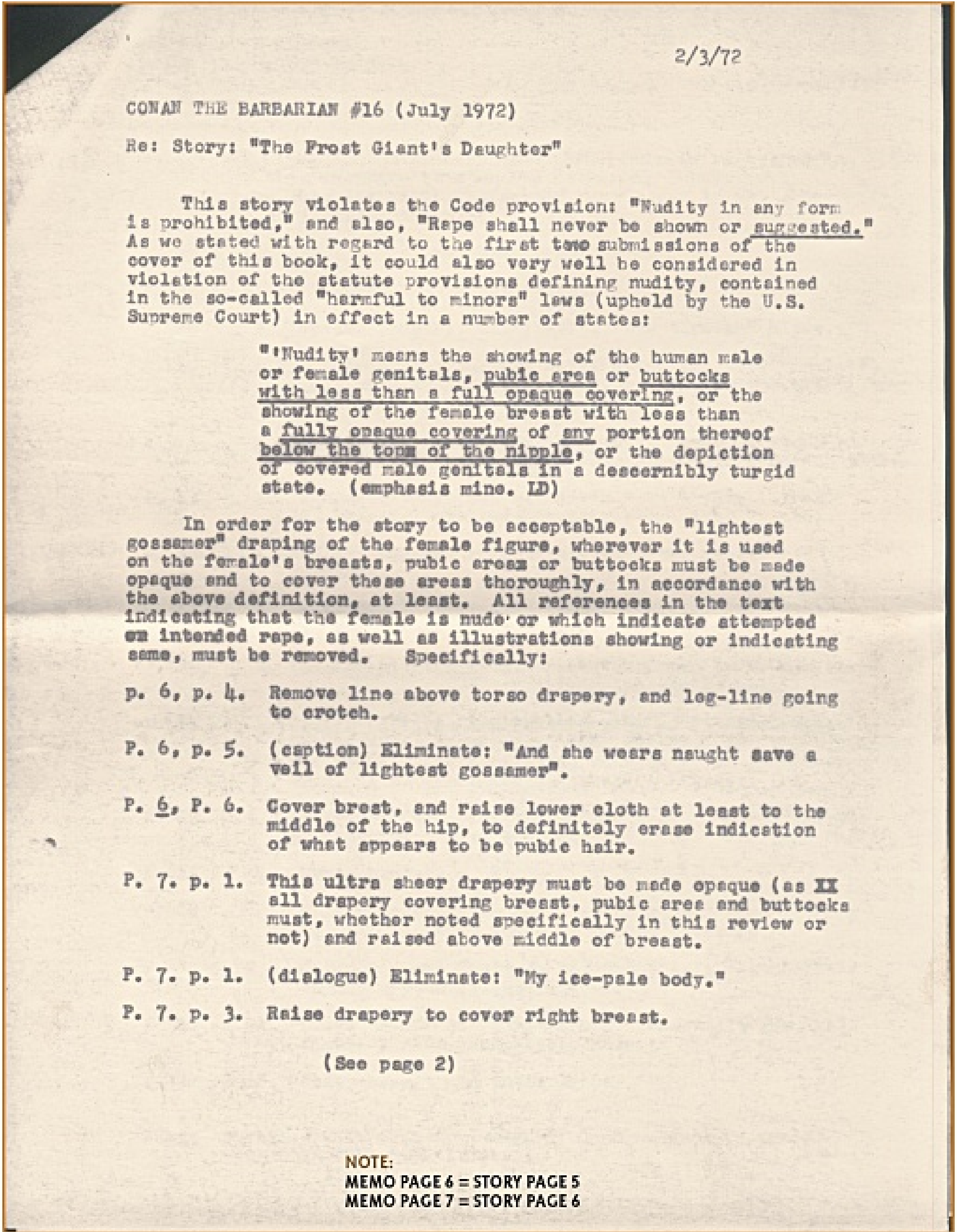
I hate to trouble you with these matters, but I believe the attached is of sufficient importance to be brought to your attention.

REFERRED FOR PURPOSE CHECKED:

☐ 1. YOUR INFORMATION
☐ 2. COMMENT & SUGGESTION
☐ 3. INVESTIGATION & REPORT
☑ 4. ACKNOWLEDGE ATTACHED
☐ 5. LETTER HAS BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED
☐ 6. SUCH ACTION AS THE FACTS MAY WARRANT
☐ 7. PLEASE SEND COPY OF YOUR REPLY
☐ 8. FOR TRANSMITTAL TO AND CONSIDERATION BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

COURTESY STEVE ENGLEHART

"THE FROST-GIANT'S DAUGHTER" WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN MARVEL'S "RATED M" MATURE READERS BLACK-AND-WHITE MAGAZINE *SAVAGE TALES* #1. WHEN THE STORY WAS SLATED FOR PUBLICATION AS A COLOR COMIC REQUIRING APPROVAL BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY, *EXTENSIVE* REVISIONS WERE REQUESTED.



2/3/72

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #16 (July 1972)

Re: Story: "The Frost Giant's Daughter"

This story violates the Code provision: "Nudity in any form is prohibited," and also, "Rape shall never be shown or suggested." As we stated with regard to the first two submissions of the cover of this book, it could also very well be considered in violation of the statute provisions defining nudity, contained in the so-called "harmful to minors" laws (upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court) in effect in a number of states:

> "'Nudity' means the showing of the human male or female genitals, pubic area or buttocks with less than a full opaque covering, or the showing of the female breast with less than a fully opaque covering of any portion thereof below the tops of the nipple, or the depiction of covered male genitals in a descernibly turgid state. (emphasis mine. LD)

In order for the story to be acceptable, the "lightest gossamer" draping of the female figure, wherever it is used on the female's breasts, pubic areas or buttocks must be made opaque and to cover these areas thoroughly, in accordance with the above definition, at least. All references in the text indicating that the female is nude or which indicate attempted or intended rape, as well as illustrations showing or indicating same, must be removed. Specifically:

p. 6, p. 4. Remove line above torso drapery, and leg-line going to crotch.

P. 6, p. 5. (caption) Eliminate: "And she wears naught save a veil of lightest gossamer".

P. 6, P. 6. Cover brest, and raise lower cloth at least to the middle of the hip, to definitely erase indication of what appears to be pubic hair.

P. 7. p. 1. This ultra sheer drapery must be made opaque (as XX all drapery covering breast, pubic area and buttocks must, whether noted specifically in this review or not) and raised above middle of breast.

P. 7. p. 1. (dialogue) Eliminate: "My ice-pale body."

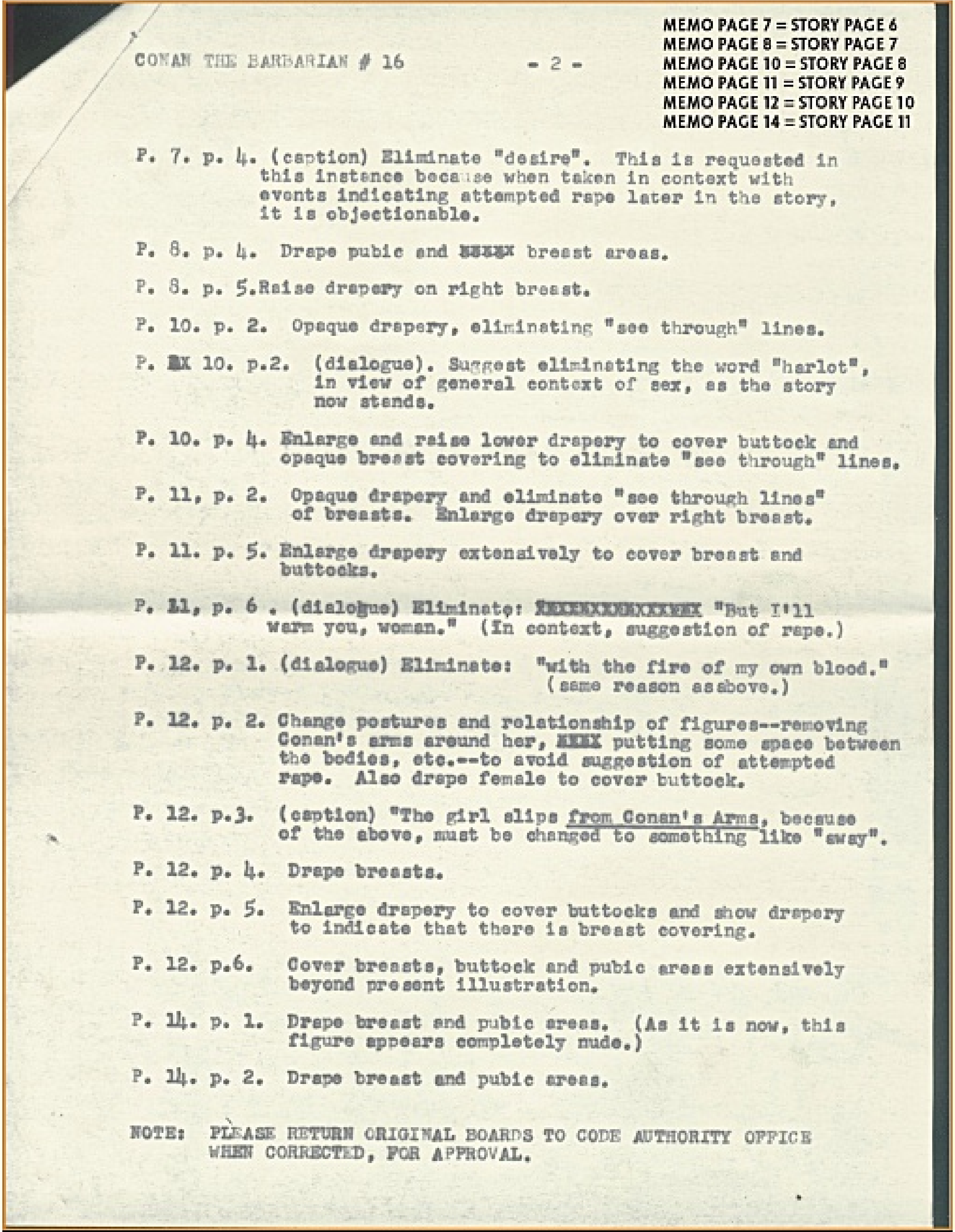
P. 7. p. 3. Raise drapery to cover right breast.

(See page 2)

NOTE:
MEMO PAGE 6 = STORY PAGE 5
MEMO PAGE 7 = STORY PAGE 6

COURTESY STEVE ENGLEHART

COMICS CODE ATTORNEY LEN DARVIN SENT THE FOLLOWING MEMO TO MARVEL PUBLISHER CHIP GOODMAN. EDITORIAL ASSISTANT (AND LATER TOP WRITER) STEVE ENGLEHART SAVED THE MEMO, PROVIDING A DETAILED LOOK INTO THE CODE'S OBJECTIONS AND THE CHANGES NECESSARY TO RECEIVE CODE APPROVAL.



MEMO PAGE 7 = STORY PAGE 6
MEMO PAGE 8 = STORY PAGE 7
MEMO PAGE 10 = STORY PAGE 8
MEMO PAGE 11 = STORY PAGE 9
MEMO PAGE 12 = STORY PAGE 10
MEMO PAGE 14 = STORY PAGE 11

CONAN THE BARBARIAN # 16 - 2 -

P. 7. p. 4. (caption) Eliminate "desire". This is requested in this instance because when taken in context with events indicating attempted rape later in the story, it is objectionable.

P. 8. p. 4. Drape pubic and XXXX breast areas.

P. 8. p. 5. Raise drapery on right breast.

P. 10. p. 2. Opaque drapery, eliminating "see through" lines.

P. XX 10. p.2. (dialogue). Suggest eliminating the word "harlot", in view of general context of sex, as the story now stands.

P. 10. p. 4. Enlarge and raise lower drapery to cover buttock and opaque breast covering to eliminate "see through" lines.

P. 11, p. 2. Opaque drapery and eliminate "see through lines" of breasts. Enlarge drapery over right breast.

P. 11. p. 5. Enlarge drapery extensively to cover breast and buttocks.

P. 11, p. 6 . (dialogue) Eliminate: XXXXXXXXXXXXXX "But I'll warm you, woman." (In context, suggestion of rape.)

P. 12. p. 1. (dialogue) Eliminate: "with the fire of my own blood." (same reason as above.)

P. 12. p. 2. Change postures and relationship of figures--removing Conan's arms around her, XXXX putting some space between the bodies, etc.--to avoid suggestion of attempted rape. Also drape female to cover buttock.

P. 12. p.3. (caption) "The girl slips from Conan's Arms, because of the above, must be changed to something like "away".

P. 12. p. 4. Drape breasts.

P. 12. p. 5. Enlarge drapery to cover buttocks and show drapery to indicate that there is breast covering.

P. 12. p.6. Cover breasts, buttock and pubic areas extensively beyond present illustration.

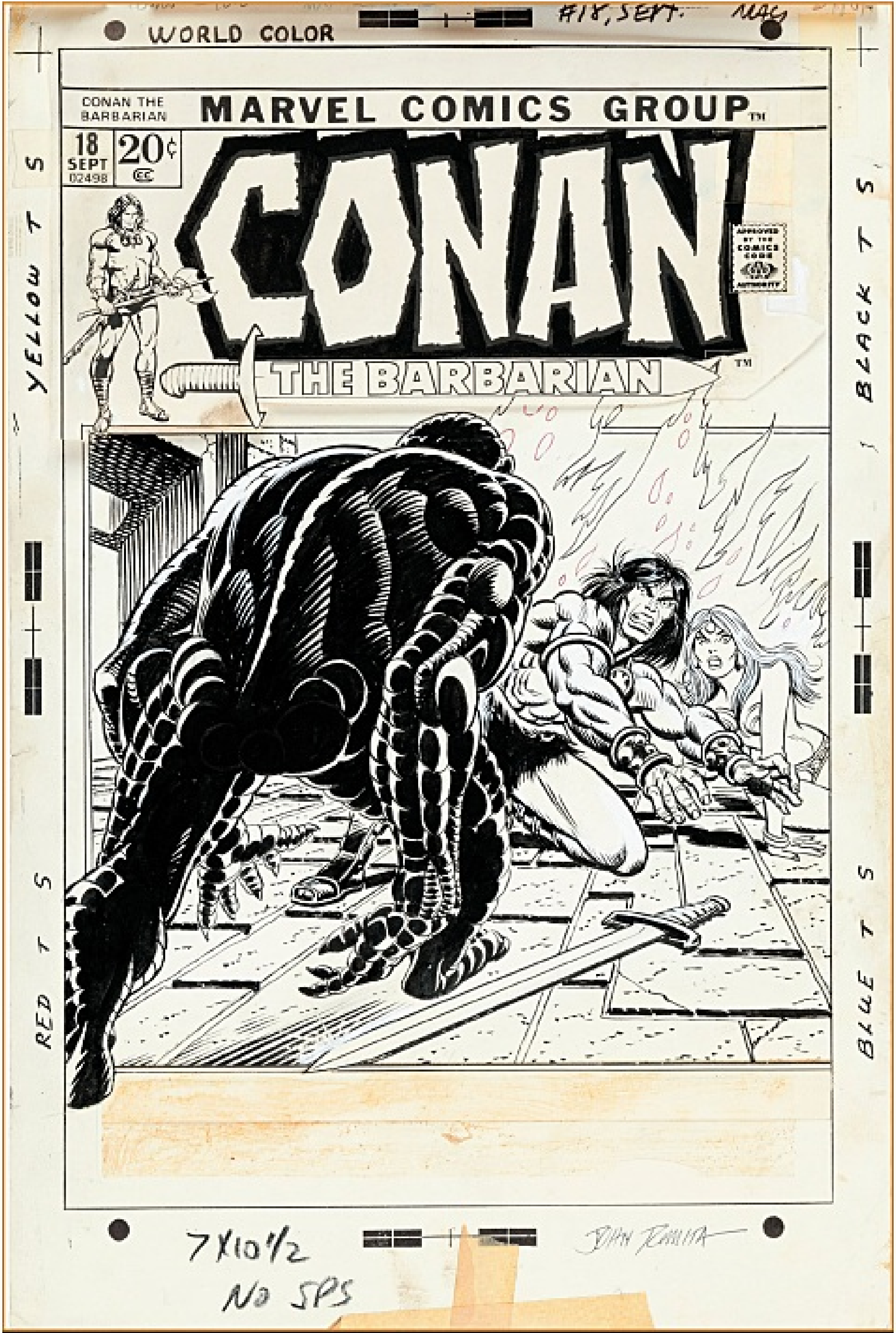
P. 14. p. 1. Drape breast and pubic areas. (As it is now, this figure appears completely nude.)

P. 14. p. 2. Drape breast and pubic areas.

NOTE: PLEASE RETURN ORIGINAL BOARDS TO CODE AUTHORITY OFFICE WHEN CORRECTED, FOR APPROVAL.

COURTESY STEVE ENGLEHART

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #16, COMICS CODE AUTHORITY REVISION MEMO (CONTINUED)


WORLD COLOR
#18, SEPT.
MAG
CONAN THE BARBARIAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
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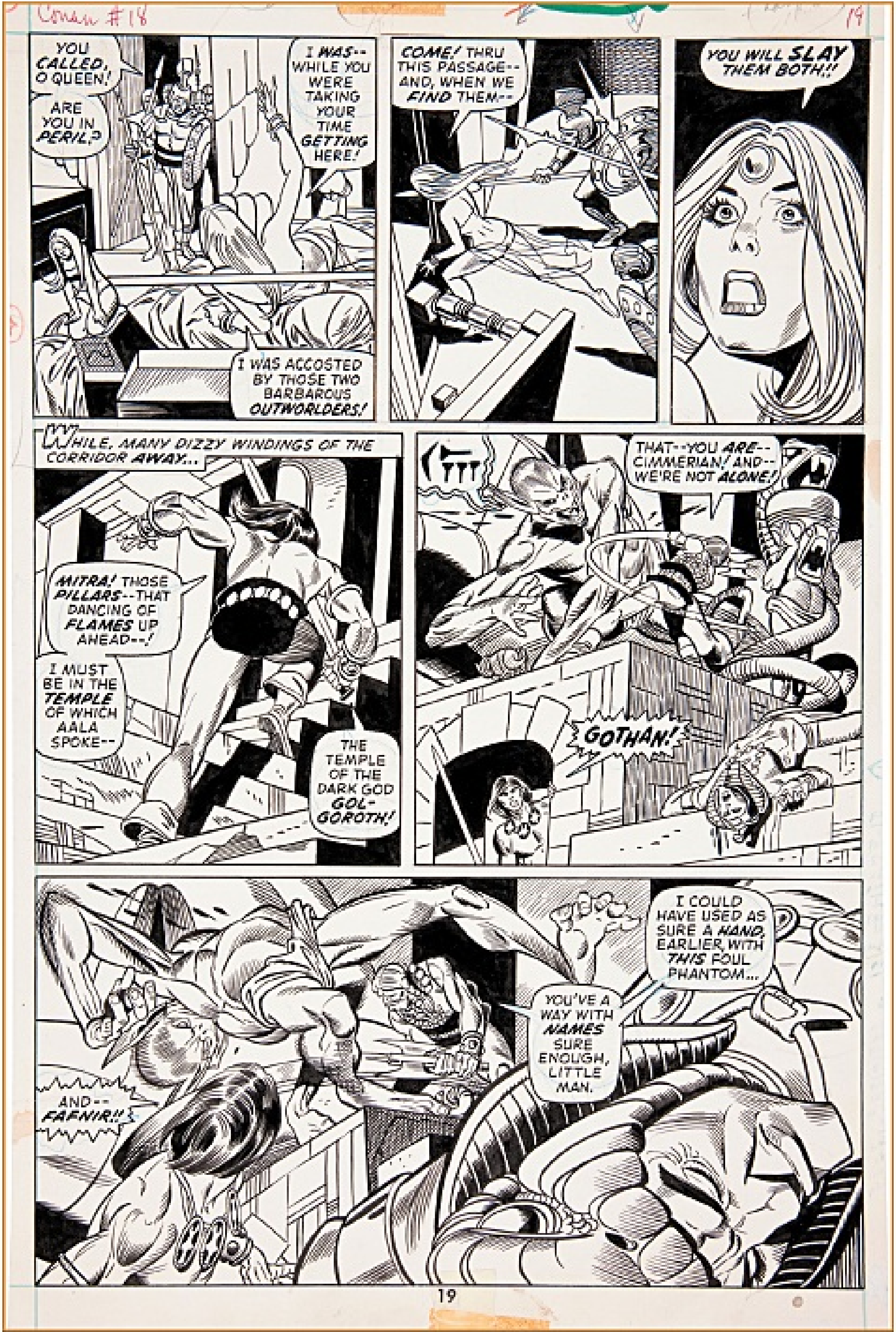
CC
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
YELLOW T S
RED T S
BLACK T S
BLUE T S
7X10½
NO SPS

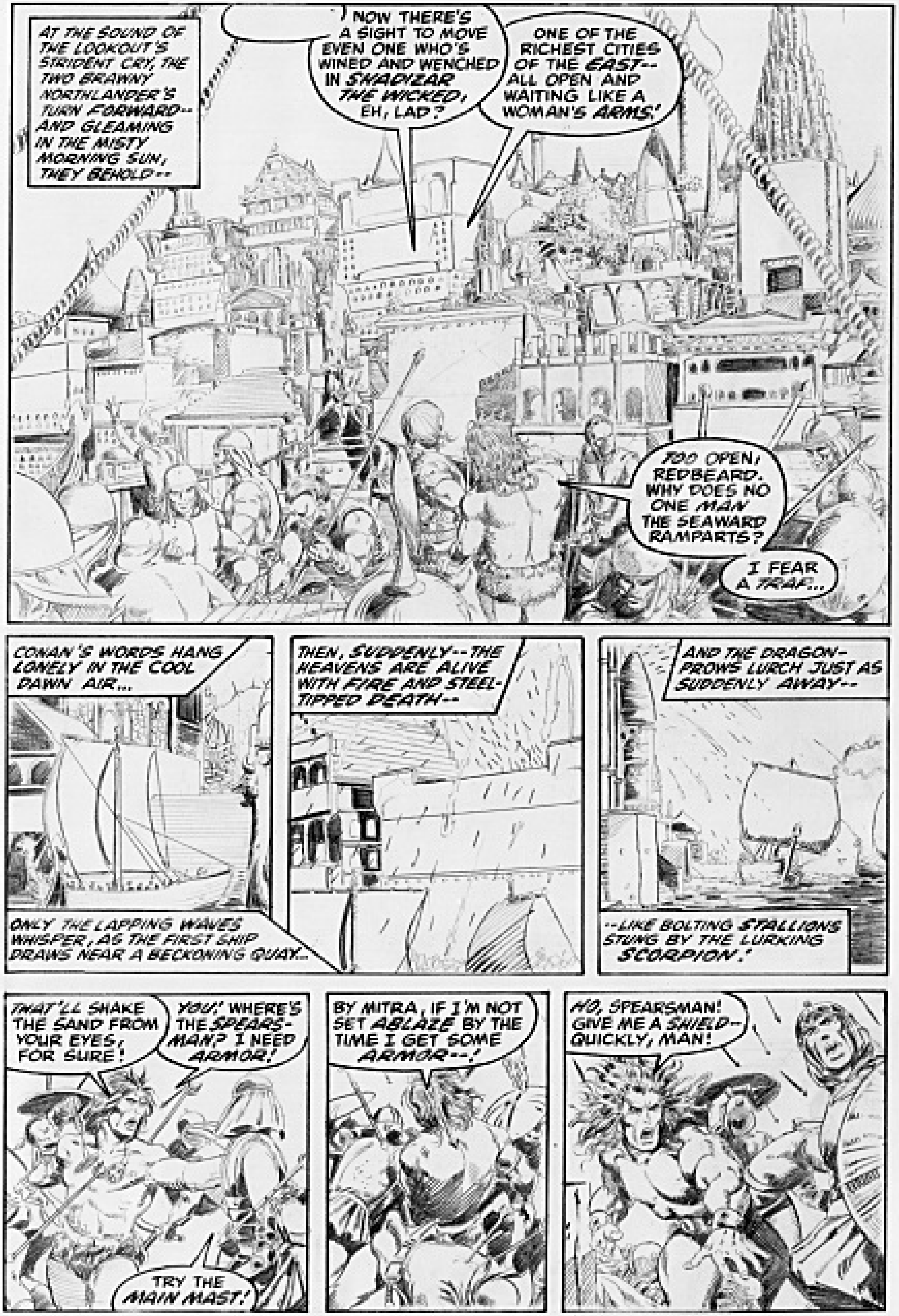
COURTESY HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #18, COVER, ORIGINAL ART, BY GIL KANE & JOHN ROMITA


Conan #18
19
YOU CALLED, O QUEEN!
ARE YOU IN PERIL?
I WAS--WHILE YOU WERE TAKING YOUR TIME GETTING HERE!
I WAS ACCOSTED BY THOSE TWO BARBAROUS OUTWORLDERS!
COME! THRU THIS PASSAGE--AND, WHEN WE FIND THEM--
YOU WILL SLAY THEM BOTH!!
WHILE, MANY DIZZY WINDINGS OF THE CORRIDOR AWAY...
MITRA! THOSE PILLARS--THAT DANCING OF FLAMES UP AHEAD--!
I MUST BE IN THE TEMPLE OF WHICH AALA SPOKE--
THE TEMPLE OF THE DARK GOD GOL-GOROTH!
THAT--YOU ARE--CIMMERIAN! AND--WE'RE NOT ALONE!
GOTHAN!
I COULD HAVE USED AS SURE A HAND, EARLIER, WITH THIS FOUL PHANTOM...
YOU'VE A WAY WITH NAMES SURE ENOUGH, LITTLE MAN.
AND--FAFNIR!!
19

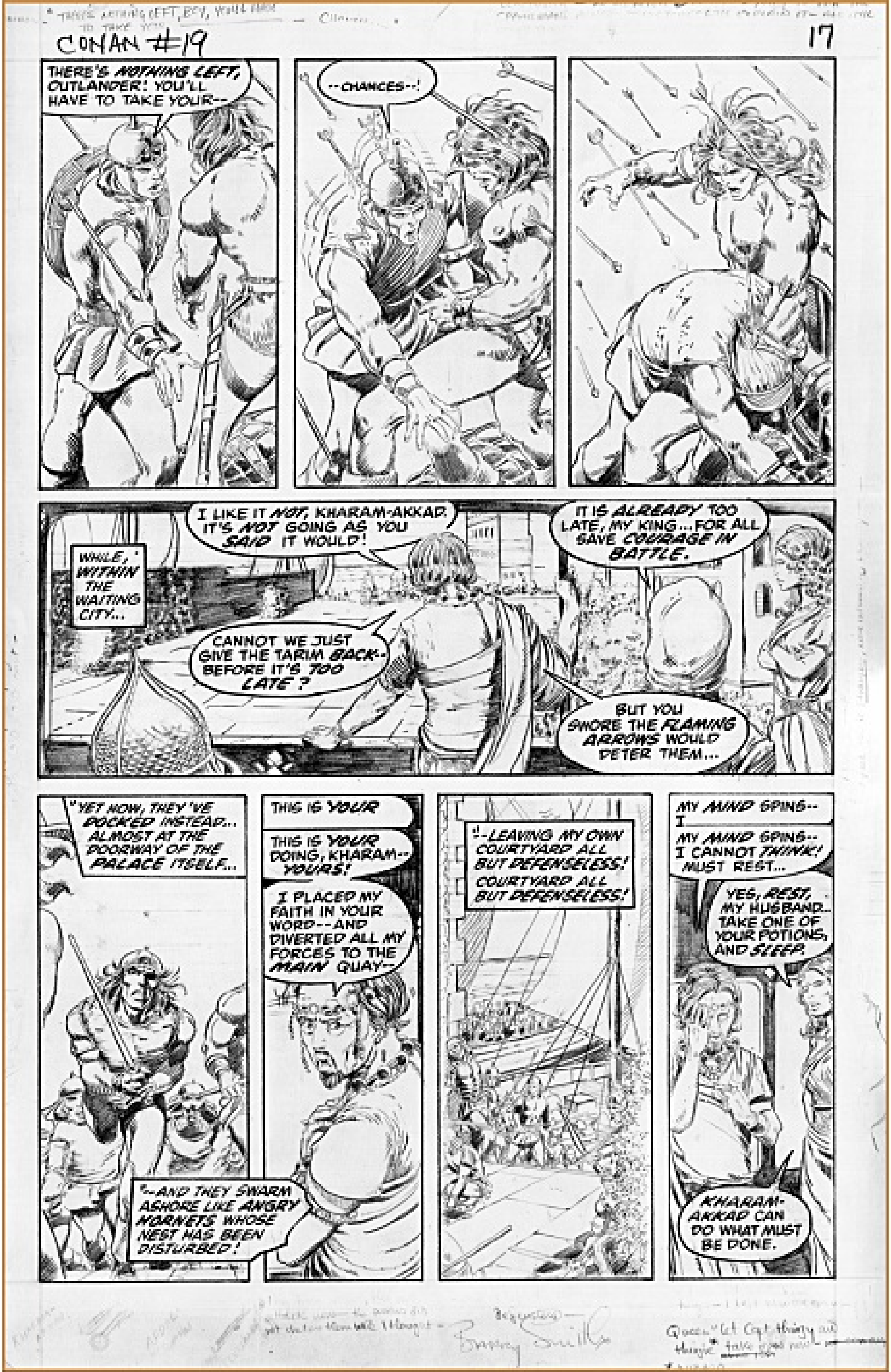
COURTESY HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

CONAN *THE BARBARIAN* #18, PAGE 13, ORIGINAL ART, BY GIL KANE & DAN ADKINS


AT THE SOUND OF THE LOOKOUT'S STRIDENT CRY, THE TWO BRAWNY NORTHLANDER'S TURN FORWARD-- AND GLEAMING IN THE MISTY MORNING SUN, THEY BEHOLD--
NOW THERE'S A SIGHT TO MOVE EVEN ONE WHO'S WINED AND WENCHED IN SHADIZAR THE WICKED, EH, LAD?
ONE OF THE RICHEST CITIES OF THE EAST-- ALL OPEN AND WAITING LIKE A WOMAN'S ARMS!
TOO OPEN, REDBEARD. WHY DOES NO ONE MAN THE SEAWARD RAMPARTS?
I FEAR A TRAP...
CONAN'S WORDS HANG LONELY IN THE COOL DAWN AIR...
ONLY THE LAPPING WAVES WHISPER, AS THE FIRST SHIP DRAWS NEAR A BECKONING QUAY...
THEN, SUDDENLY-- THE HEAVENS ARE ALIVE WITH FIRE AND STEEL-TIPPED DEATH--
AND THE DRAGON-PROWS LURCH JUST AS SUDDENLY AWAY--
--LIKE BOLTING STALLIONS STUNG BY THE LURKING SCORPION!
THAT'LL SHAKE THE SAND FROM YOUR EYES, FOR SURE!
YOU!' WHERE'S THE SPEARSMAN? I NEED ARMOR!
TRY THE MAIN MAST!
BY MITRA, IF I'M NOT SET ABLAZE BY THE TIME I GET SOME ARMOR--!
NO, SPEARSMAN! GIVE ME A SHIELD-- QUICKLY, MAN!

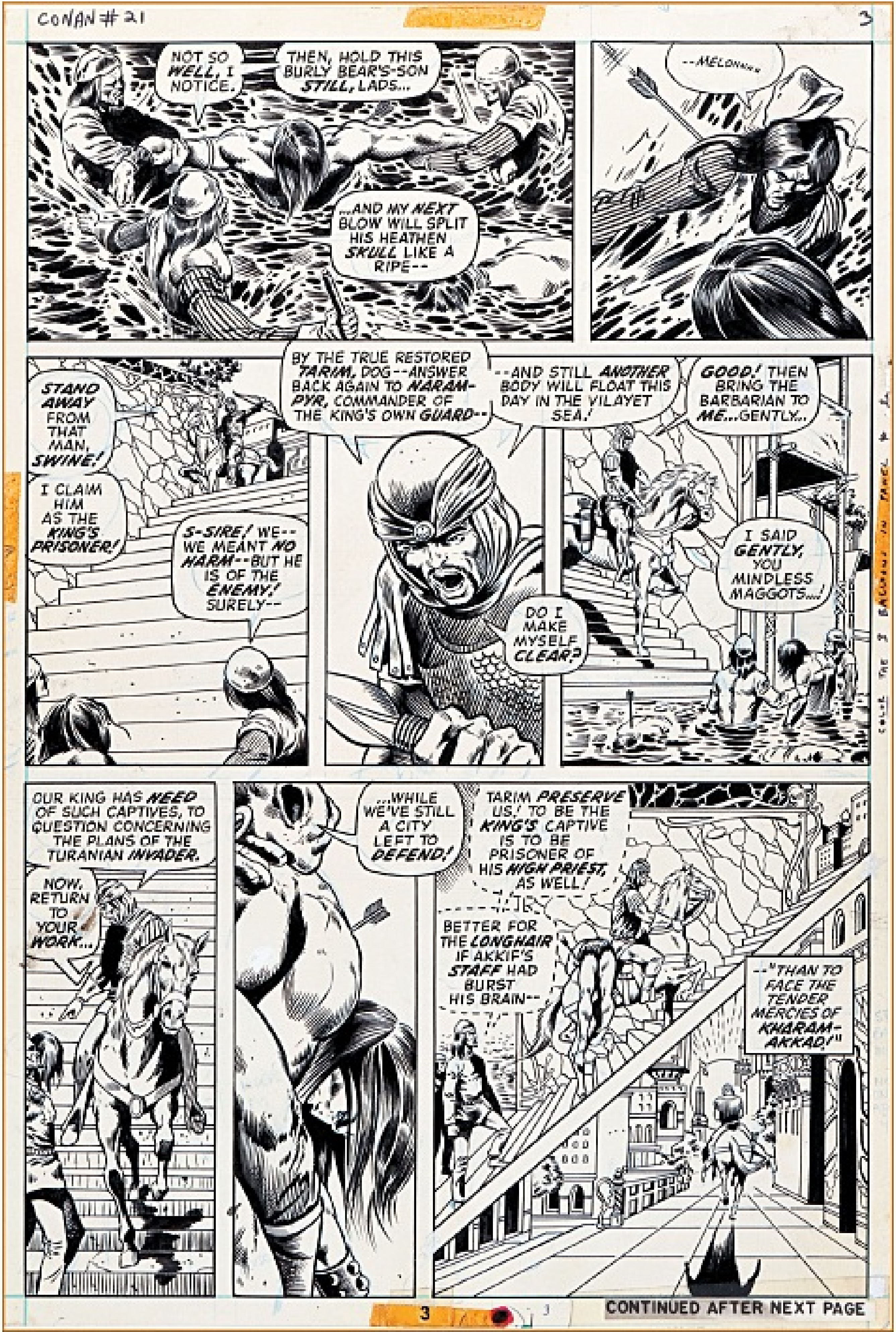
COURTESY F.H. NAVARRO

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #19, PAGE 10, PENCIL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH


* THERE'S NOTHING LEFT, BOY, YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE YOUR
CONAN #19
17
THERE'S NOTHING LEFT, OUTLANDER! YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE YOUR--
--CHANCES--!
I LIKE IT NOT, KHARAM-AKKAD. IT'S NOT GOING AS YOU SAID IT WOULD!
IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE, MY KING... FOR ALL SAVE COURAGE IN BATTLE.
WHILE, WITHIN THE WAITING CITY...
CANNOT WE JUST GIVE THE TARIM BACK-- BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE?
BUT YOU SWORE THE FLAMING ARROWS WOULD DETER THEM...
"YET NOW, THEY'VE DOCKED INSTEAD... ALMOST AT THE DOORWAY OF THE PALACE ITSELF...
"--AND THEY SWARM ASHORE LIKE ANGRY HORNETS WHOSE NEST HAS BEEN DISTURBED!
THIS IS YOUR
THIS IS YOUR DOING, KHARAM-- YOURS!
I PLACED MY FAITH IN YOUR WORD--AND DIVERTED ALL MY FORCES TO THE MAIN QUAY--
"--LEAVING MY OWN COURTYARD ALL BUT DEFENSELESS!
COURTYARD ALL BUT DEFENSELESS!
MY MIND SPINS-- I
MY MIND SPINS-- I CANNOT THINK! MUST REST...
YES, REST, MY HUSBAND.. TAKE ONE OF YOUR POTIONS, AND SLEEP.
KHARAM-AKKAD CAN DO WHAT MUST BE DONE.
Barry Smith
Queen* let Capt. thingy and thingie* take good care

COURTESY F.H. NAVARRO

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #19, PAGE 11, PENCIL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH



CONAN #21
3
NOT SO WELL, I NOTICE.
THEN, HOLD THIS BURLY BEAR'S-SON STILL, LADS...
...AND MY NEXT BLOW WILL SPLIT HIS HEATHEN SKULL LIKE A RIPE--
--MELONNN
STAND AWAY FROM THAT MAN, SWINE!
I CLAIM HIM AS THE KING'S PRISONER!
BY THE TRUE RESTORED TARIM, DOG--ANSWER BACK AGAIN TO NARAM-PYR, COMMANDER OF THE KING'S OWN GUARD--
--AND STILL ANOTHER BODY WILL FLOAT THIS DAY IN THE VILAYET SEA!
S-SIRE! WE--WE MEANT NO HARM--BUT HE IS OF THE ENEMY! SURELY--
DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?
GOOD! THEN BRING THE BARBARIAN TO ME...GENTLY..
I SAID GENTLY, YOU MINDLESS MAGGOTS...!
OUR KING HAS NEED OF SUCH CAPTIVES, TO QUESTION CONCERNING THE PLANS OF THE TURANIAN INVADER.
NOW, RETURN TO YOUR WORK...
...WHILE WE'VE STILL A CITY LEFT TO DEFEND!
TARIM PRESERVE US! TO BE THE KING'S CAPTIVE IS TO BE PRISONER OF HIS HIGH PRIEST, AS WELL!
BETTER FOR THE LONGHAIR IF AKKIF'S STAFF HAD BURST HIS BRAIN--
--"THAN TO FACE THE TENDER MERCIES OF KHARAM-AKKAD!"
3
CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

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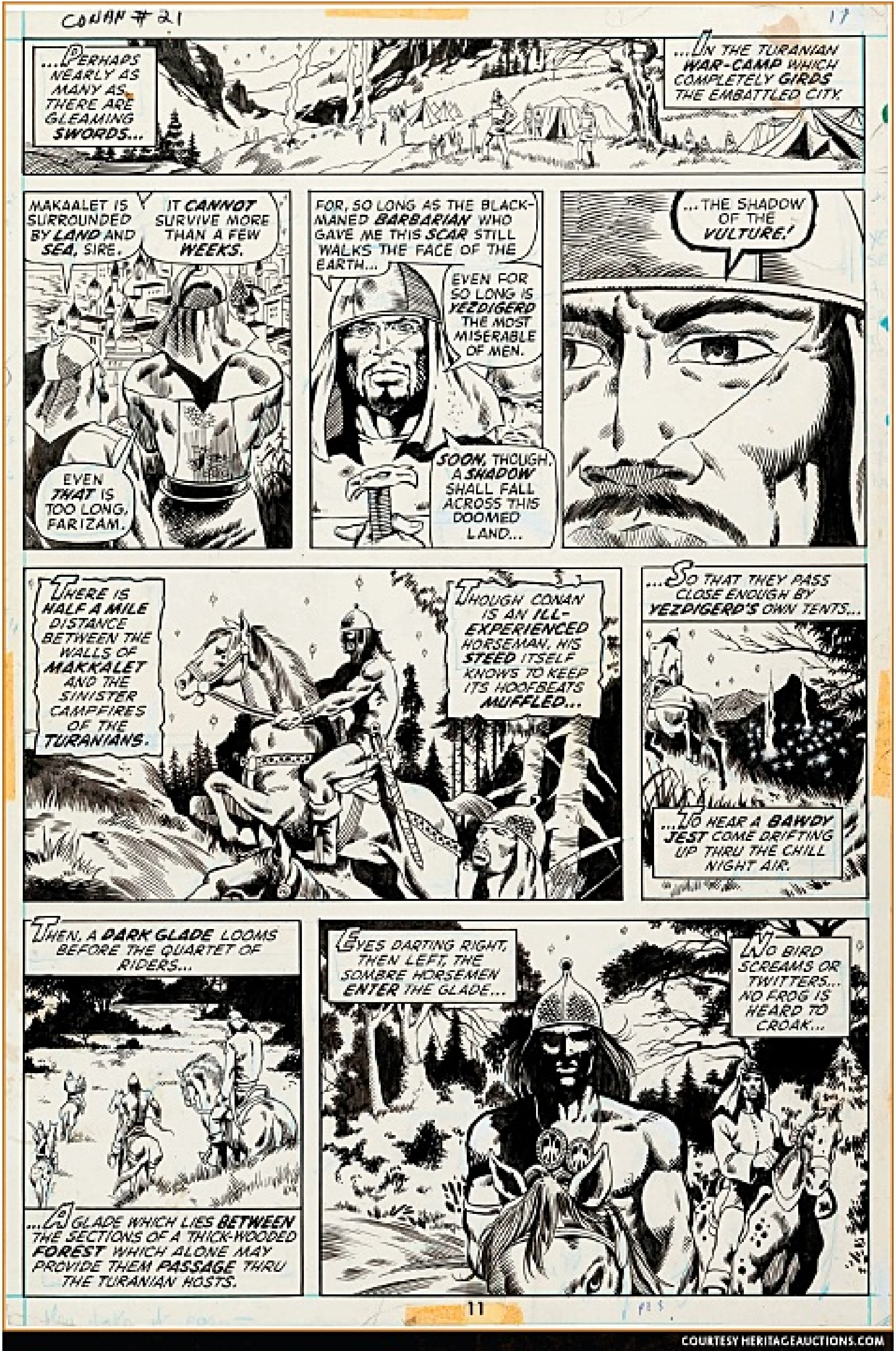
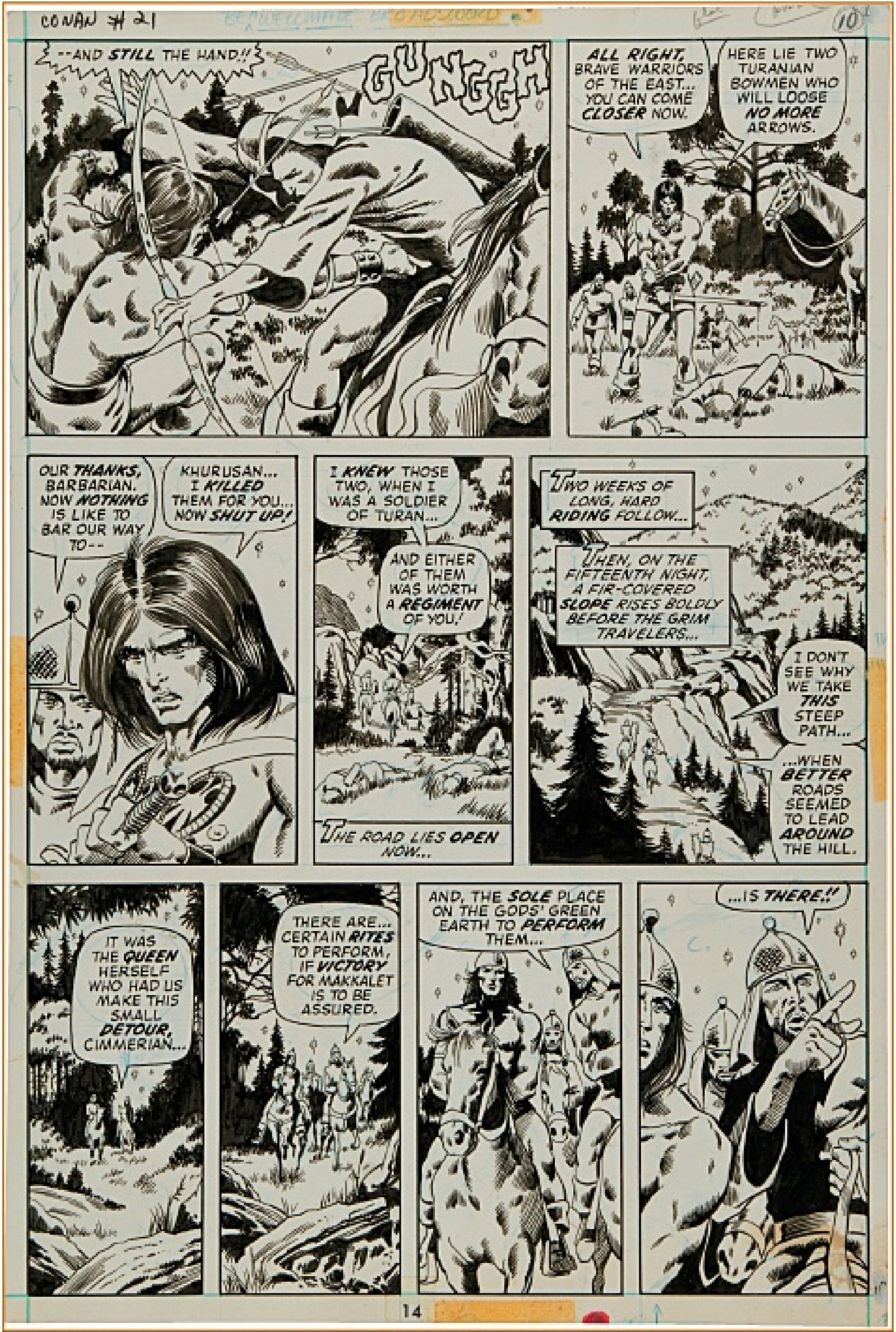
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #21, PAGE 3, ORIGINAL ART
LAYOUTS BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH; FINISHES BY VAL MAYERIK, P. CRAIG RUSSELL & SAL BUSCEMA


CONAN #21
17
...PERHAPS NEARLY AS MANY AS THERE ARE GLEAMING SWORDS...
...IN THE TURANIAN WAR-CAMP WHICH COMPLETELY GIRDS THE EMBATTLED CITY.
MAKAALET IS SURROUNDED BY LAND AND SEA, SIRE.
IT CANNOT SURVIVE MORE THAN A FEW WEEKS.
EVEN THAT IS TOO LONG, FARIZAM.
FOR, SO LONG AS THE BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN WHO GAVE ME THIS SCAR STILL WALKS THE FACE OF THE EARTH...
EVEN FOR SO LONG IS YEZDIGERD THE MOST MISERABLE OF MEN.
SOON, THOUGH, A SHADOW SHALL FALL ACROSS THIS DOOMED LAND...
...THE SHADOW OF THE VULTURE!
THERE IS HALF A MILE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE WALLS OF MAKKALET AND THE SINISTER CAMPFIRES OF THE TURANIANS.
THOUGH CONAN IS AN ILL-EXPERIENCED HORSEMAN, HIS STEED ITSELF KNOWS TO KEEP ITS HOOFBEATS MUFFLED...
...SO THAT THEY PASS CLOSE ENOUGH BY YEZDIGERD'S OWN TENTS...
...TO HEAR A BAWDY JEST COME DRIFTING UP THRU THE CHILL NIGHT AIR.
THEN, A DARK GLADE LOOMS BEFORE THE QUARTET OF RIDERS...
...A GLADE WHICH LIES BETWEEN THE SECTIONS OF A THICK-WOODED FOREST WHICH ALONE MAY PROVIDE THEM PASSAGE THRU THE TURANIAN HOSTS.
EYES DARTING RIGHT, THEN LEFT, THE SOMBRE HORSEMEN ENTER THE GLADE...
NO BIRD SCREAMS OR TWITTERS... NO FROG IS HEARD TO CROAK...
11

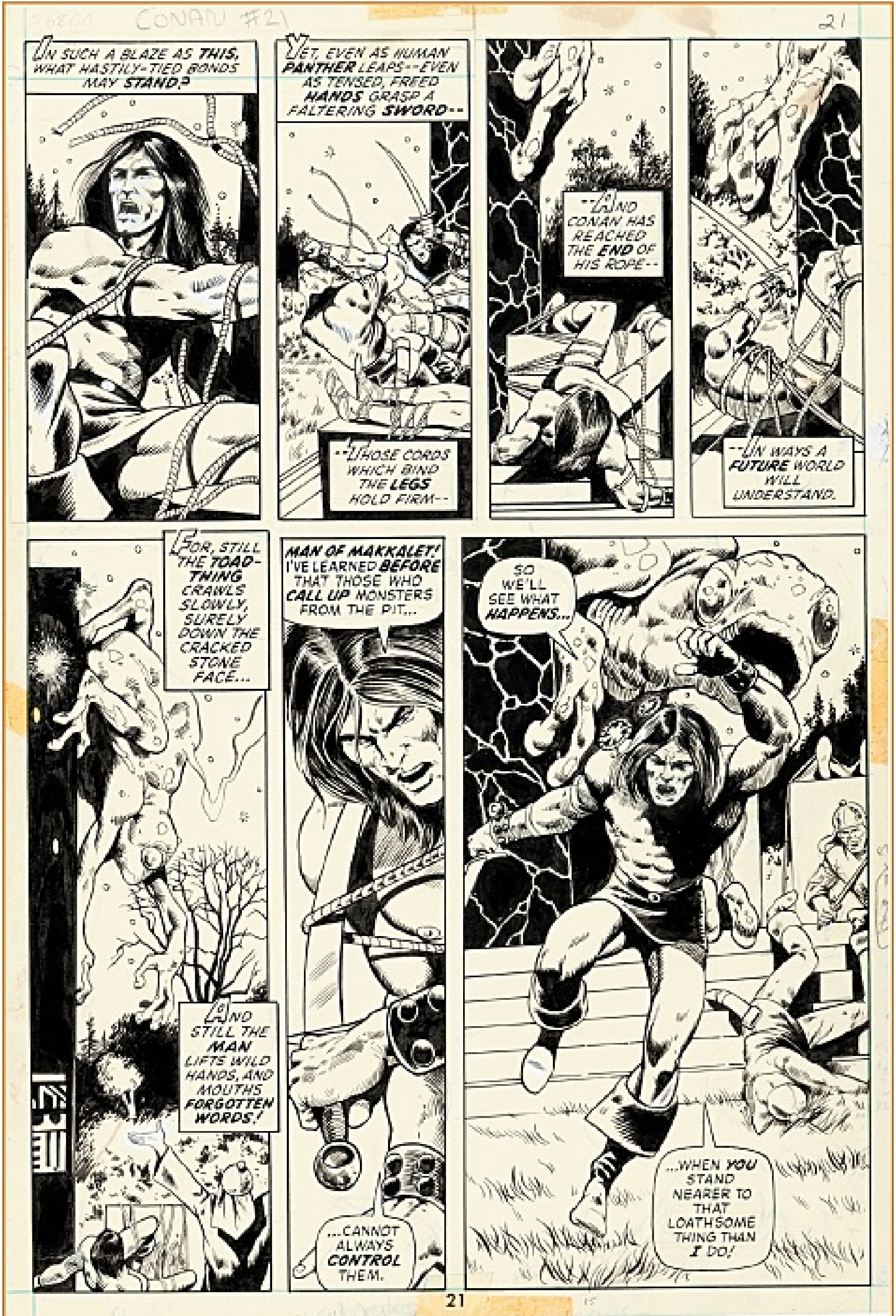
COURTESY HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #21, PAGE 8, ORIGINAL ART
LAYOUTS BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH; FINISHES BY VAL MAYERIK, P. CRAIG RUSSELL & SAL BUSCEMA


CONAN #21
10
--AND STILL THE HAND!!
GUNGGH
ALL RIGHT, BRAVE WARRIORS OF THE EAST... YOU CAN COME CLOSER NOW.
HERE LIE TWO TURANIAN BOWMEN WHO WILL LOOSE NO MORE ARROWS.
OUR THANKS, BARBARIAN. NOW NOTHING IS LIKE TO BAR OUR WAY TO--
KHURUSAN... I KILLED THEM FOR YOU... NOW SHUT UP!
I KNEW THOSE TWO, WHEN I WAS A SOLDIER OF TURAN...
AND EITHER OF THEM WAS WORTH A REGIMENT OF YOU!
THE ROAD LIES OPEN NOW...
TWO WEEKS OF LONG, HARD RIDING FOLLOW...
THEN, ON THE FIFTEENTH NIGHT, A FIR-COVERED SLOPE RISES BOLDLY BEFORE THE GRIM TRAVELERS...
I DON'T SEE WHY WE TAKE THIS STEEP PATH...
...WHEN BETTER ROADS SEEMED TO LEAD AROUND THE HILL.
IT WAS THE QUEEN HERSELF WHO HAD US MAKE THIS SMALL DETOUR, CIMMERIAN...
THERE ARE... CERTAIN RITES TO PERFORM, IF VICTORY FOR MAKKALET IS TO BE ASSURED.
AND, THE SOLE PLACE ON THE GODS' GREEN EARTH TO PERFORM THEM...
...IS THERE!!
14

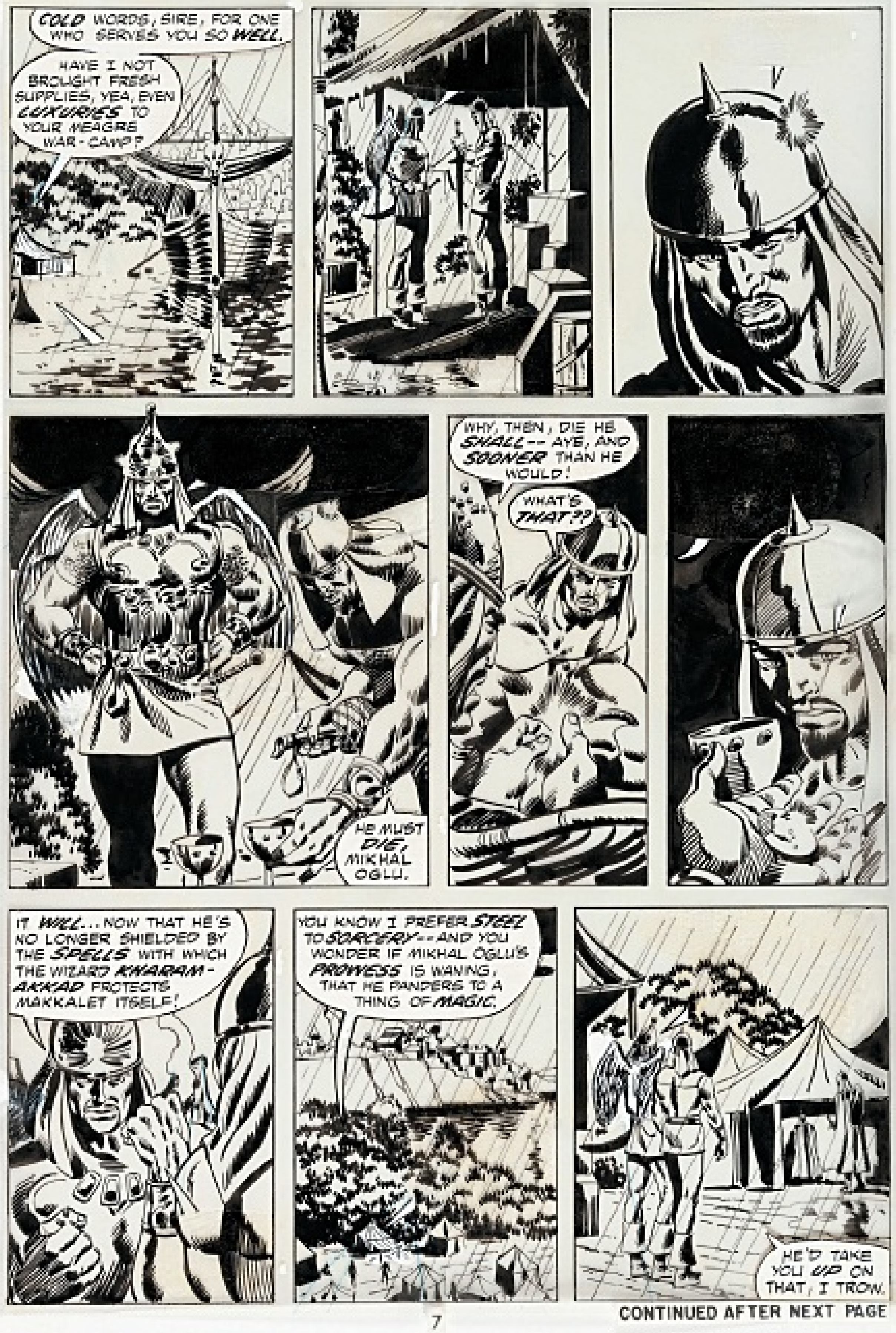
COURTESY HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #21, PAGE 10, ORIGINAL ART
LAYOUTS BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH; FINISHES BY VAL MAYERIK, P. CRAIG RUSSELL & SAL BUSCEMA


56800 CONAN #21
21
IN SUCH A BLAZE AS THIS, WHAT HASTILY-TIED BONDS MAY STAND?
YET, EVEN AS HUMAN PANTHER LEAPS--EVEN AS TENSED, FREED HANDS GRASP A FALTERING SWORD--
--THOSE CORDS WHICH BIND THE LEGS HOLD FIRM--
--AND CONAN HAS REACHED THE END OF HIS ROPE--
--IN WAYS A FUTURE WORLD WILL UNDERSTAND.
FOR, STILL THE TOAD-THING CRAWLS SLOWLY, SURELY DOWN THE CRACKED STONE FACE...
AND STILL THE MAN LIFTS WILD HANDS, AND MOUTHS FORGOTTEN WORDS!
MAN OF MAKKALET! I'VE LEARNED BEFORE THAT THOSE WHO CALL UP MONSTERS FROM THE PIT...
...CANNOT ALWAYS CONTROL THEM.
SO WE'LL SEE WHAT HAPPENS...
...WHEN YOU STAND NEARER TO THAT LOATHSOME THING THAN I DO!
21

COURTESY HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #21, PAGE 15, ORIGINAL ART
LAYOUTS BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH; FINISHES BY VAL MAYERIK, P. CRAIG RUSSELL & SAL BUSCEMA


COLD WORDS, SIRE, FOR ONE WHO SERVES YOU SO WELL.
HAVE I NOT BROUGHT FRESH SUPPLIES, YEA, EVEN LUXURIES TO YOUR MEAGRE WAR-CAMP?
HE MUST DIE, MIKHAL OGLU.
WHY, THEN, DIE HE SHALL-- AYE, AND SOONER THAN HE WOULD!
WHAT'S THAT??
IT WILL... NOW THAT HE'S NO LONGER SHIELDED BY THE SPELLS WITH WHICH THE WIZARD KHARAM-AKKAD PROTECTS MAKKALET ITSELF!
YOU KNOW I PREFER STEEL TO SORCERY--AND YOU WONDER IF MIKHAL OGLU'S PROWESS IS WANING, THAT HE PANDERS TO A THING OF MAGIC.
HE'D TAKE YOU UP ON THAT, I TROW.
CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE
7

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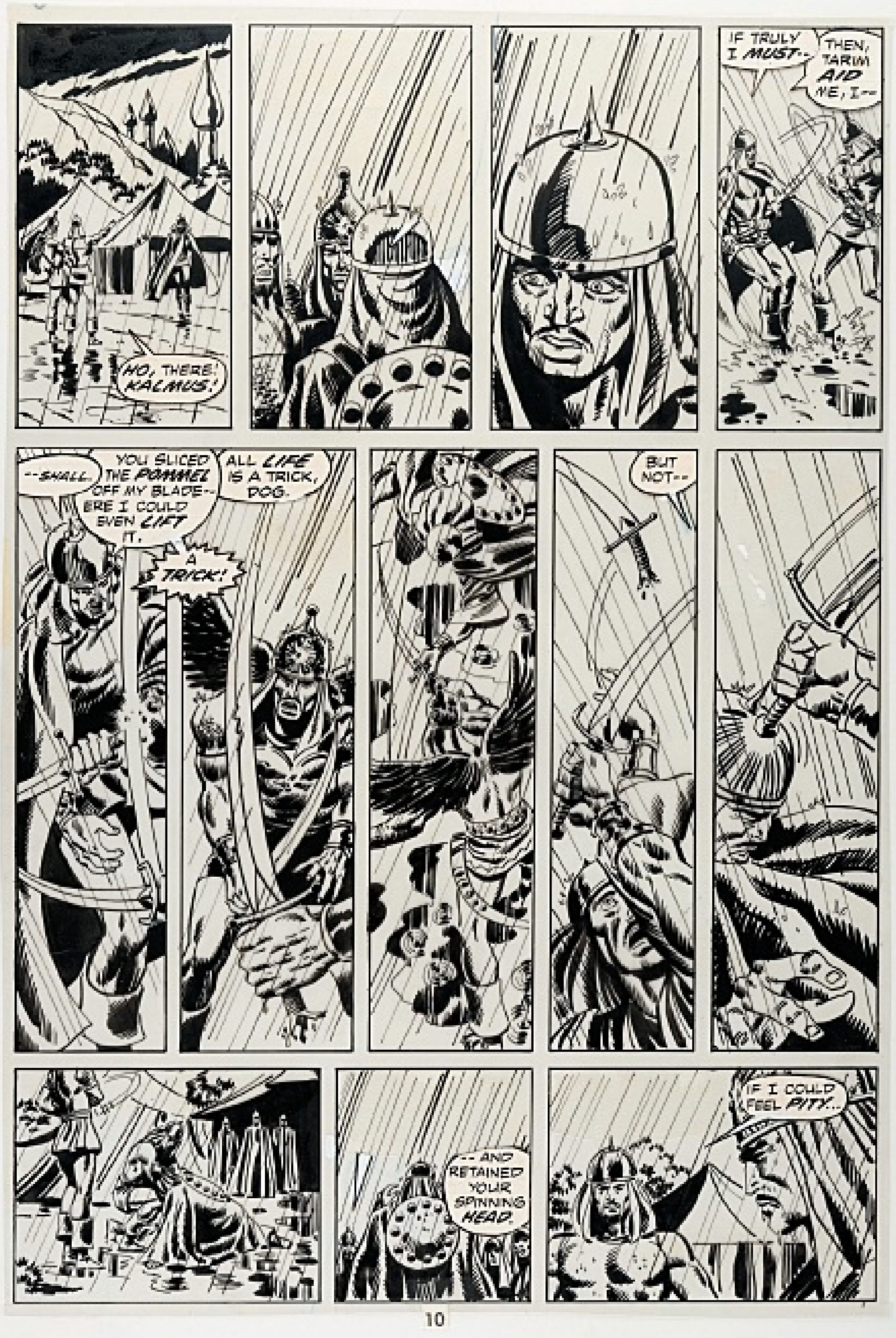
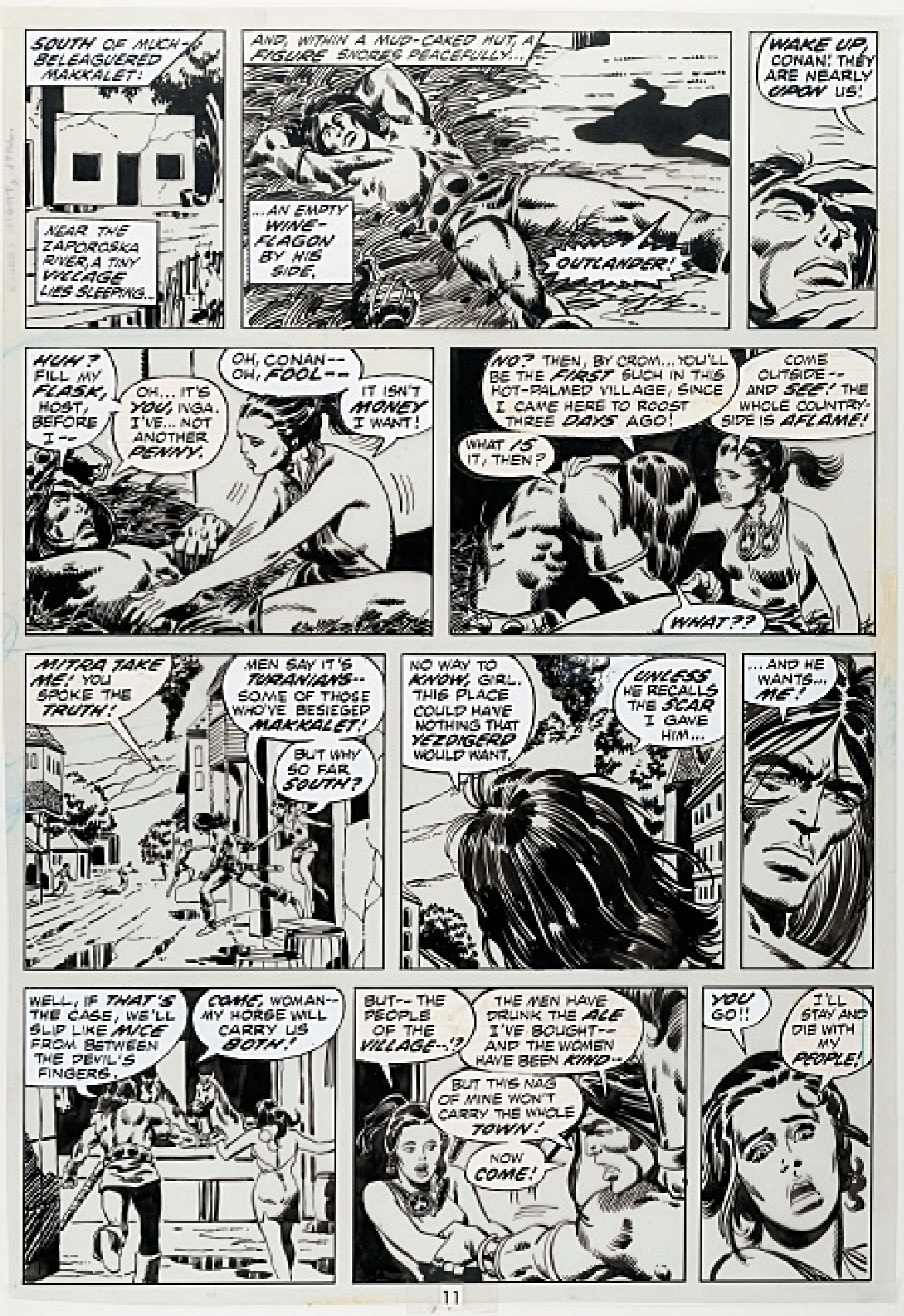
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #23, PAGE 6, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA


HO, THERE! KALMUS!
IF TRULY I MUST--
THEN, TARIM AID ME, I--
--SHALL--
YOU SLICED THE POMMEL OFF MY BLADE--ERE I COULD EVEN LIFT IT.
ALL LIFE IS A TRICK, DOG.
A TRICK!
BUT NOT--
--AND RETAINED YOUR SPINNING HEAD!
IF I COULD FEEL PITY...
10

COURTESY HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #23, PAGE 7, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA


SOUTH OF MUCH-BELEAGUERED MAKKALET!
NEAR THE ZAPOROSKA RIVER, A TINY VILLAGE LIES SLEEPING...
AND, WITHIN A MUD-CAKED HUT, A FIGURE SNORES PEACEFULLY...
...AN EMPTY WINE-FLAGON BY HIS SIDE.
OUTLANDER!
WAKE UP, CONAN! THEY ARE NEARLY UPON US!
HUH? FILL MY FLASK, HOST, BEFORE I--
OH, CONAN-- OH, FOOL--
OH... IT'S YOU, INGA. I'VE... NOT ANOTHER PENNY.
IT ISN'T MONEY I WANT!
NO? THEN, BY CROM... YOU'LL BE THE FIRST SUCH IN THIS HOT-PALMED VILLAGE, SINCE I CAME HERE TO ROOST THREE DAYS AGO!
WHAT IS IT, THEN?
COME OUTSIDE-- AND SEE! THE WHOLE COUNTRY-SIDE IS AFLAME!
WHAT??
MITRA TAKE ME! YOU SPOKE THE TRUTH!
MEN SAY IT'S TURANIANS-- SOME OF THOSE WHO'VE BESIEGED MAKKALET!
BUT WHY SO FAR SOUTH?
NO WAY TO KNOW, GIRL. THIS PLACE COULD HAVE NOTHING THAT YEZDIGERD WOULD WANT.
UNLESS HE RECALLS THE SCAR I GAVE HIM...
...AND HE WANTS... ME!
WELL, IF THAT'S THE CASE, WE'LL SLIP LIKE MICE FROM BETWEEN THE DEVIL'S FINGERS.
COME, WOMAN-- MY HORSE WILL CARRY US BOTH!
BUT-- THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE--!?
THE MEN HAVE DRUNK THE ALE I'VE BOUGHT-- AND THE WOMEN HAVE BEEN KIND--
BUT THIS NAG OF MINE WON'T CARRY THE WHOLE TOWN!
NOW COME!
YOU GO!!
I'LL STAY AND DIE WITH MY PEOPLE!
11

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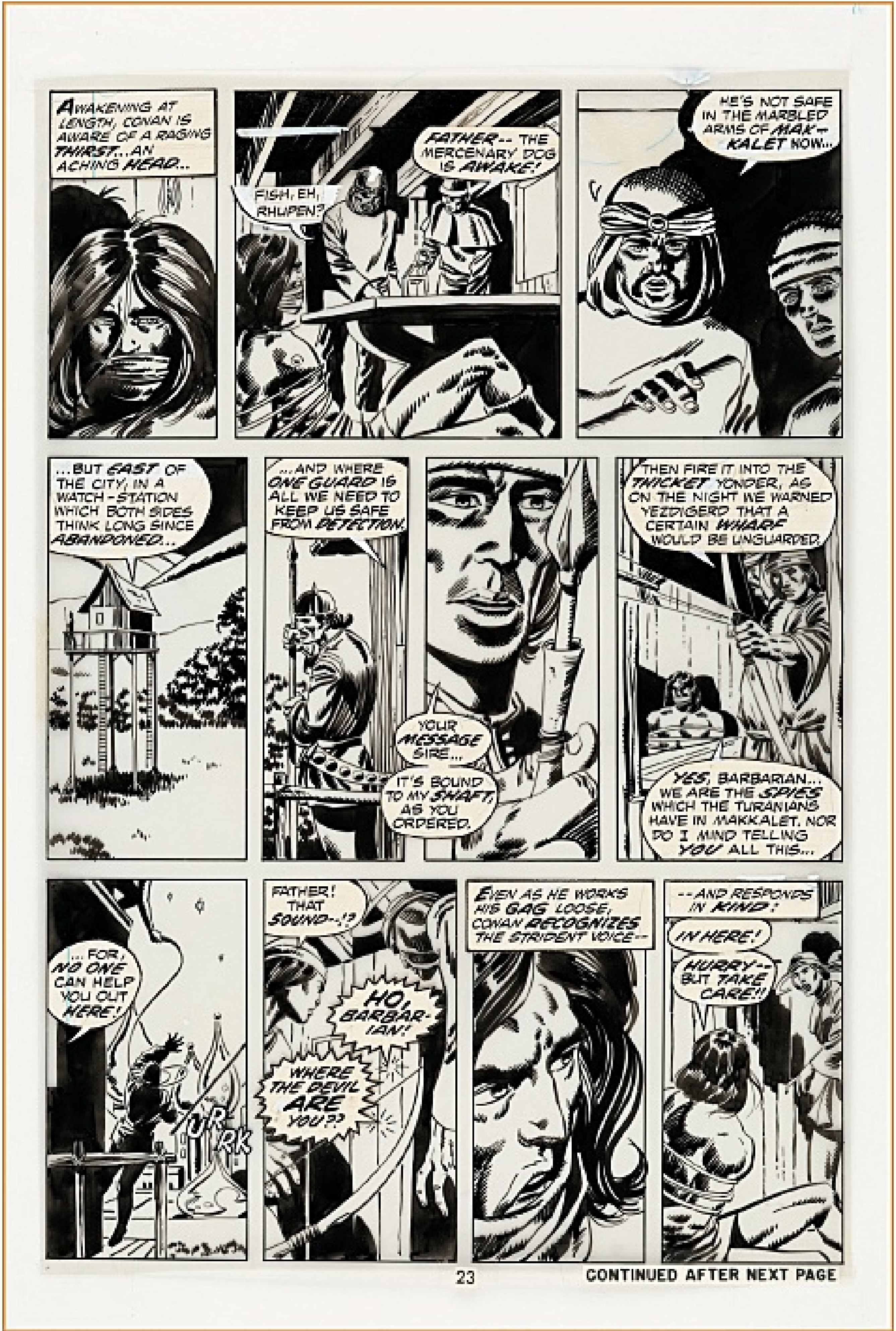
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #23, PAGE 8, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA


AWAKENING AT LENGTH, CONAN IS AWARE OF A RAGING THIRST... AN ACHING HEAD...
FATHER-- THE MERCENARY DOG IS AWAKE!
FISH, EH, RHUPEN?
HE'S NOT SAFE IN THE MARBLED ARMS OF MAK--KALET NOW...
...BUT EAST OF THE CITY, IN A WATCH-STATION WHICH BOTH SIDES THINK LONG SINCE ABANDONED...
...AND WHERE ONE GUARD IS ALL WE NEED TO KEEP US SAFE FROM DETECTION.
YOUR MESSAGE SIRE...
IT'S BOUND TO MY SHAFT, AS YOU ORDERED.
THEN FIRE IT INTO THE THICKET YONDER, AS ON THE NIGHT WE WARNED YEZDIGERD THAT A CERTAIN WHARF WOULD BE UNGUARDED.
YES, BARBARIAN... WE ARE THE SPIES WHICH THE TURANIANS HAVE IN MAKKALET. NOR DO I MIND TELLING YOU ALL THIS...
...FOR, NO ONE CAN HELP YOU OUT HERE!
URRK
FATHER! THAT SOUND--!?
HO, BARBARIAN!
WHERE THE DEVIL ARE YOU??
EVEN AS HE WORKS HIS GAG LOOSE, CONAN RECOGNIZES THE STRIDENT VOICE--
--AND RESPONDS IN KIND:
IN HERE!
HURRY-- BUT TAKE CARE!!
23
CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

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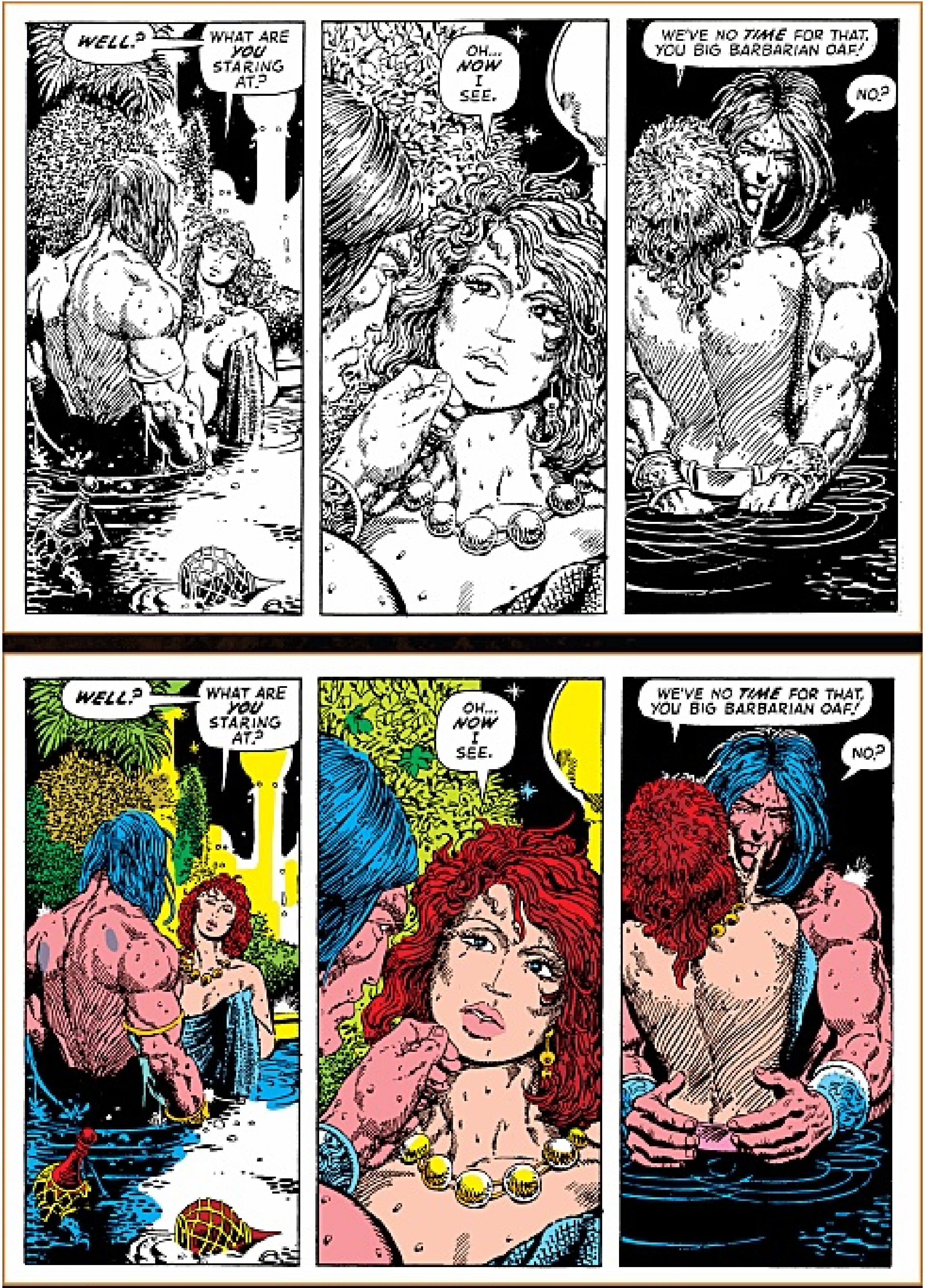
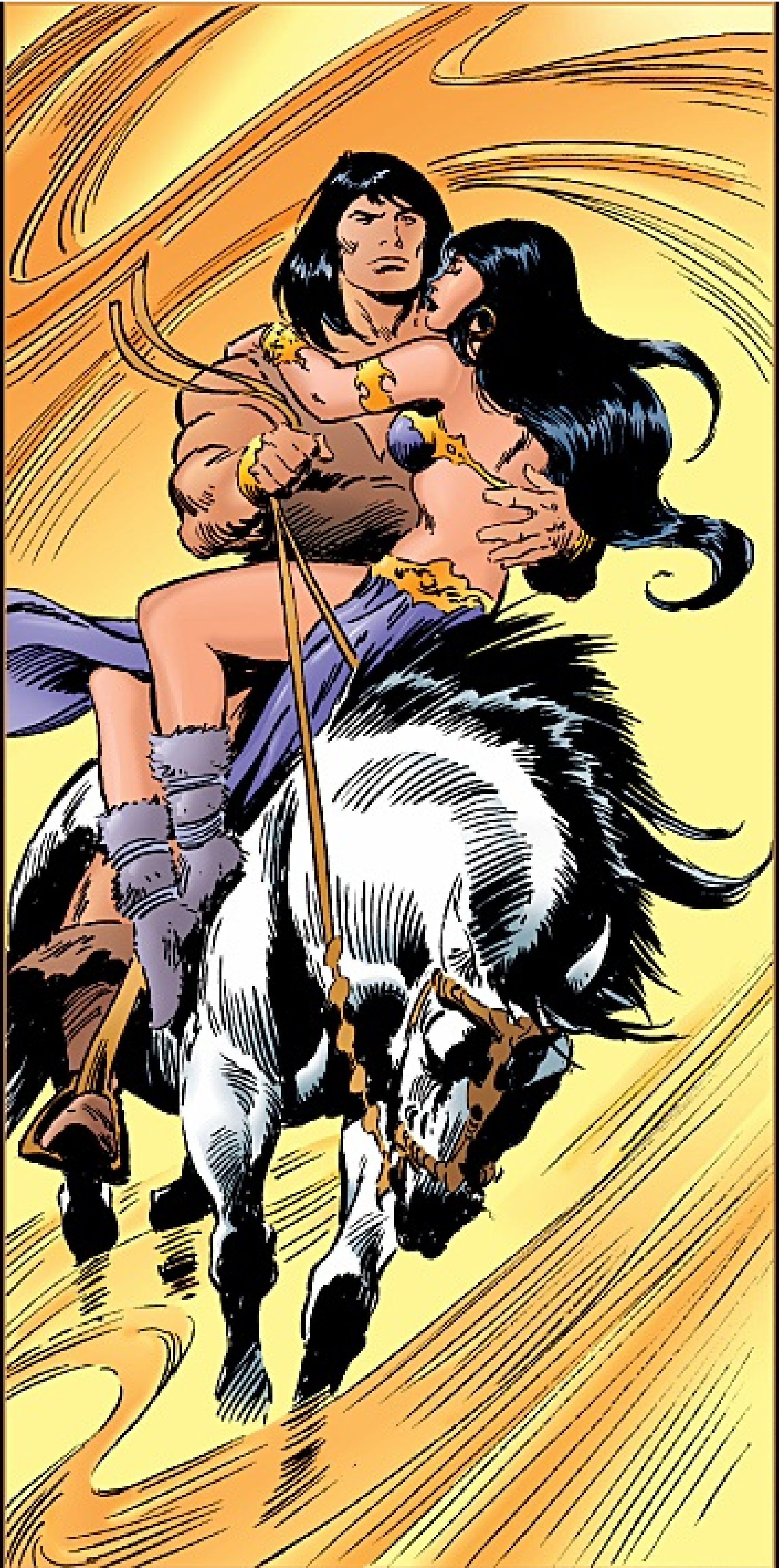
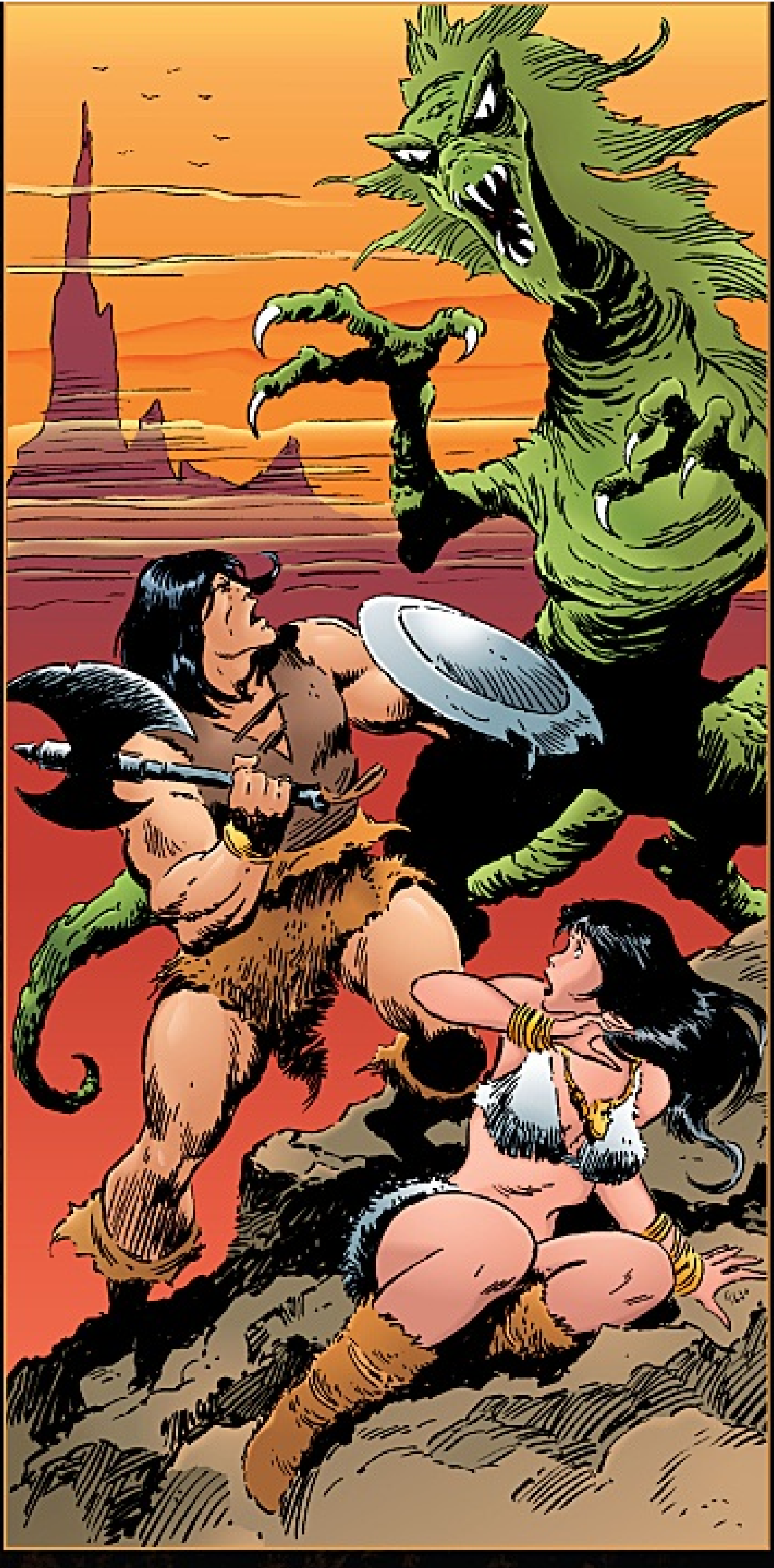
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #23, PAGE 16, ORIGINAL ART, BY BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH & SAL BUSCEMA


WELL.?
WHAT ARE *YOU* STARING AT.?
OH... *NOW* I SEE.
WE'VE NO *TIME* FOR THAT, YOU BIG BARBARIAN OAF!
NO.?
WELL.?
WHAT ARE *YOU* STARING AT.?
OH... *NOW* I SEE.
WE'VE NO *TIME* FOR THAT, YOU BIG BARBARIAN OAF!
NO.?

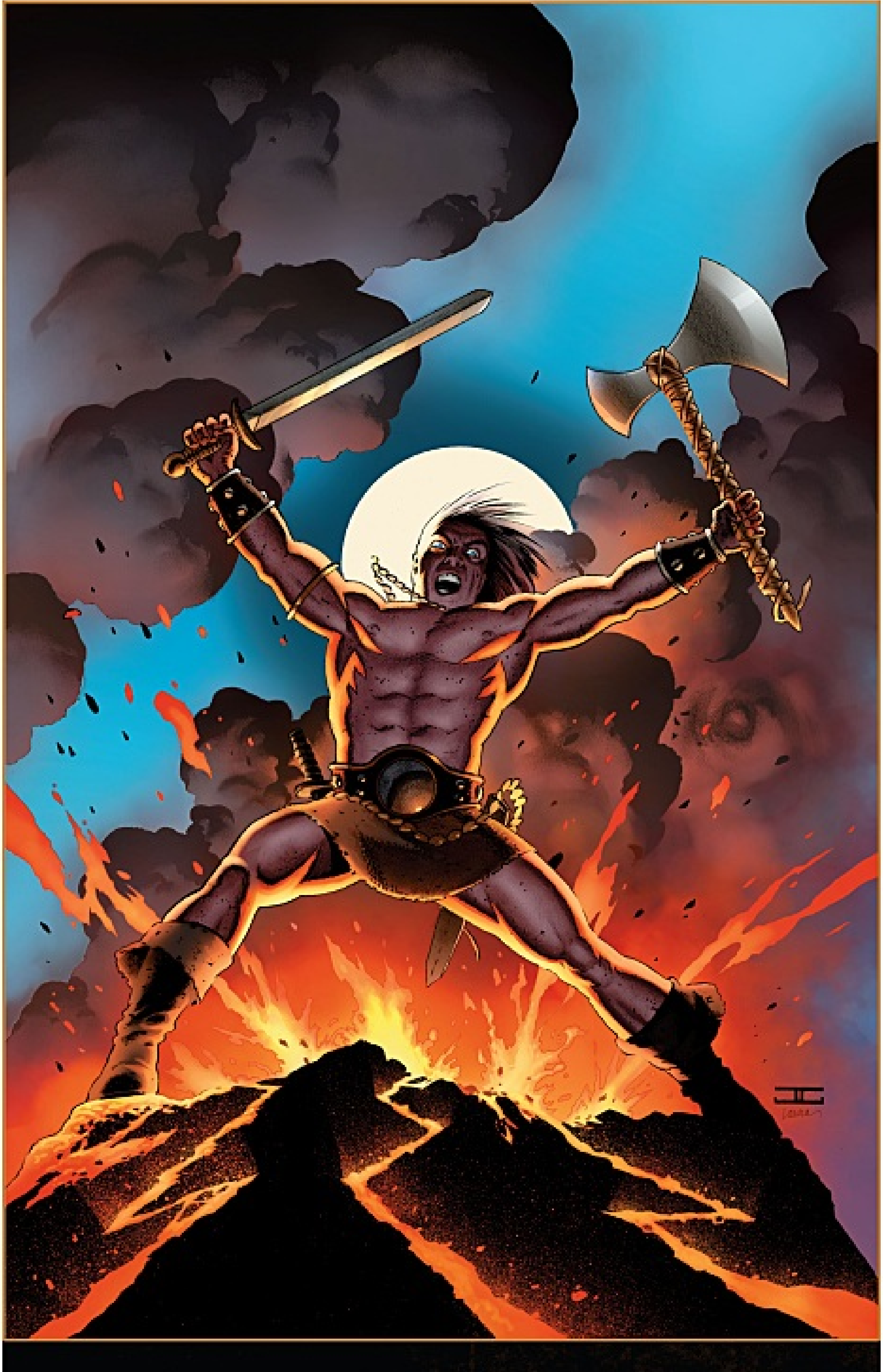
THE COMICS CODE REQUESTED ALTERATIONS TO CONAN AND RED SONJA'S ENCOUNTER ON *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* #24, PAGE 6: ORIGINAL VERSION (TOP), FINAL PRINT VERSION (BOTTOM).



THE ESSENTIAL CONAN THE BARBARIAN VOL. 1 (JULY 2000) COVER ART, BY JOHN BUSCEMA & MARIE JAVINS

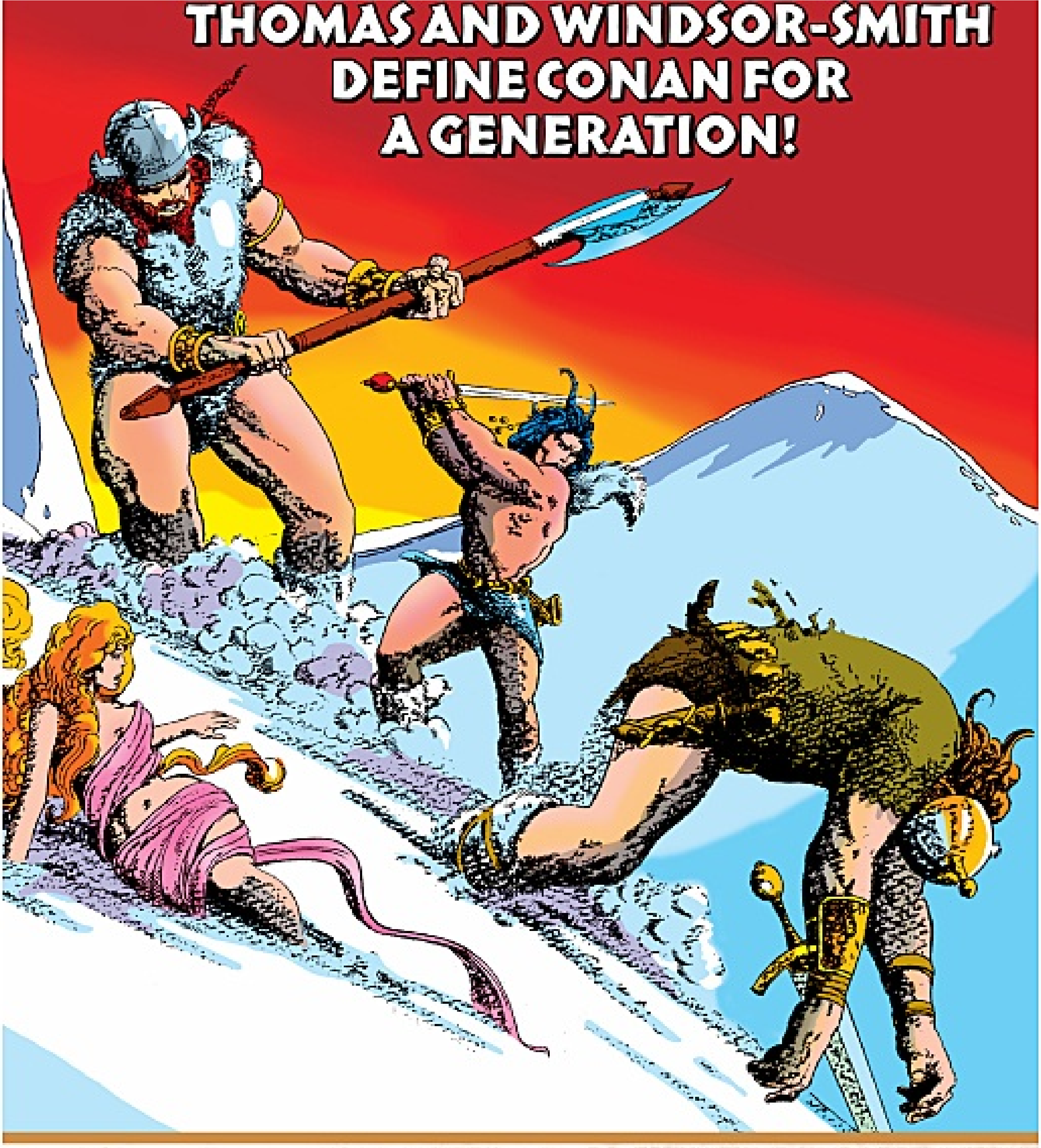


RELEASED IN THE FINAL DAYS OF MARVEL'S ORIGINAL TENURE AS PUBLISHERS OF CONAN COMIC BOOKS, *THE ESSENTIAL CONAN VOL. 1* REPRINTED *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* #1-25 WITH NEW COVER ART BY JOHN BUSCEMA, ONE OF HIS LAST PIECES BEFORE PASSING AWAY IN JANUARY 2002.



CONAN THE BARBARIAN: THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS OMNIBUS VOL. 1 COVER (JANUARY 2019)
BY JOHN CASSADAY & LAURA MARTIN

THOMAS AND WINDSOR-SMITH DEFINE CONAN FOR A GENERATION!



Marvel's original sword-and-sorcery series, *Conan the Barbarian*, continues with iconic tales by writer Roy Thomas and artists Barry Windsor-Smith, Gil Kane and John Buscema. In these adventures, Conan's path crosses with the albino antihero Eric and his soul-stealing sword Stormbringer, and, on the shores of Bal-Sagoth, a new comrade in arms, the mighty Fafnir. Together Conan and Fafnir sail the Vilayet Sea and join the mercenary forces of the War of the Tarim, a holy conflict between Makkalet and Turan. It's a saga full of adventure, intrigue and loss that shows the true face of war. Also featuring the full-color adaptation of Robert E. Howard's Conan classic, "The Frost Giant's Daughter" and the first appearance of Thomas and Windsor-Smith's Red Sonja!

VOLUME
2
1972–1973

CONAN THE BARBARIAN (1970) #14-26.

The Epic Collections feature the best characters and stories from Marvel's vast history. Volumes are not published in chronological order — so start your collection today with this edition, and look inside for a complete list of available and upcoming releases!